



MILESTONE
RECOVERY

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Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the joint standing committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Oliver Bradeen, I am the executive Recovery in director of Milestone Portland, Maine and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1135: An Act Regarding Substance Use Disorder Treatment Services and Increasing Reimbursement Rates for Those Services.

As the Maine Attorney General's office has stated, 2020 was the deadliest year from substance use disorders in Maine's history. While we have engaged in a multifaceted approach to combatting the opioid epidemic and substance use disorder in this state, we continue to fall short. Milestone Recovery operates a stand-alone medical detox program in Portland and an Extended care residential PNMI for substance use disorders in Old Orchard Beach. Both programs have been essential functions of our agency and Maine's continuum of care for decades and both are at risk due to funding challenges. LD 1135 would help to increase reimbursement rates to not only minimally sustain the services, but to ensure they are robust, well-staffed and providing best practice care.

There are only two stand alone, non-profit PNMI Detoxification programs in the state of Maine. The total number of detox beds in the state are 26, with Milestone operating 16 of them. Currently, due to the inability to staff registered nurses our detox program is closed. This challenge is a direct result of the funding we receive to operate these services. There is a nursing shortage in Maine and nationally, but we have been underpaying our staff for years because our reimbursement rates have been stagnant. We are forced to pay lower wages to stay fiscally responsible as an organization. These lower wages often mean we are not able to attract staff or retain them due to opportunities elsewhere in the community. The best practice for detox is to have nursing monitor the medical withdrawal symptoms, counselors meet with the clients and peers support professionals support our clients through their journey. Our current funding model's level of reimbursement barely covers the cost of the nurses that are required to operate the program, it does not adequately afford us the counseling and peer support workers that we supply. Medical detox is essential for the majority of substances that are being used in the community. While going directly to medication assisted treatment and bypassing detox is an option for someone solely using opiates, there are medical needs and other factors for other substances like Alcohol and Benzodiazepines.

Milestone Recovery also operates our Extended Care program in Old Orchard Beach. This program has often been referred to as a "last stop" for our clients. Clients entering that program have often not been able to complete other programs, have not been able to maintain their recovery, or are at risk of jail or prison if they are not able

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to complete treatment. The options for PNMI residential and extended care programs are limited. The non-profit residential programs available in the state of Maine can be counted on one hand. While there has been a move towards outpatient services in Maine, there is a continued need for residential services for SUD. Many of our clients in OOB would be languishing in jail or prison if we were not an option for them. There is a need for residential services for those that would not otherwise have a safe and stable place to enter their recovery.

Lastly, Milestone Recovery and other providers utilizing Mainecare serve Mainers in need who are not able to access the for-profit services for substance use disorders. While there are many for profit programs in Maine and the country, they are cost-prohibitive for most Maine's population. I want to acknowledge that we are currently going through a Mainecare rate evaluation process. While I believe this process will indicate the need for increased funding, it is less clear if the funding increase will meet the needs of the organizations providing these essential services. As I have stated, our cost to operate, in part due to workforce shortages, have gone up rapidly while rates have been stagnant. To sustain substance use disorder programming for people whose only path to treatment is through Mainecare services and to combat the deadly opioid epidemic in the state I am voicing support for LD 1135.

Thank you,

Oliver Bradeen, LCPC

Executive Director

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