



Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine
The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers

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Testimony in support of LD 1009

**Resolve, to Create a Health Care Ombudsman Position to
Serve in Maine's County Jails**

Sponsored by Representative Colleen Madigan

April 7, 2021

Good Afternoon Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee On Health and Human Services.

I am Kaitlyn Morse, a resident of Westbrook, and the Policy Associate of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Alliance in support of LD 1009, A Resolve to Create a Health Care Ombudsman Position to Serve in Maine's County Jails.

The Alliance represents Maine's safety net community based mental health and substance use treatment agencies. We advocate for sound policies and evidence-based practices that serve to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our behavioral health care system.

Access to behavioral health services for the most unstable and vulnerable members of our community is one of the issues we feel most passionately about at the Alliance.

Treatment facilities in Maine are insufficient to meet the need. Jails are tense places where mental illness is exacerbated. Nationally, around 80 percent of prison and jail inmates had either mental health or substance problems. We know this is consistent in Maine where lack of appropriate access to medication, mental health services, and other health care resources makes things more difficult.

When mentally ill adults in Maine struggle to get appropriate care they may languish in local jails rather than enter the state's mental health system. Prisoners with mental illness are often transferred from one facility to the other in what has been referred to as the, "diagnosis game."

Jail staff may even experience their own struggles with mental health. With a silent epidemic among lockup staff nationally and more than 19% struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder and the risk of suicide higher for corrections officers than all other professions combined.

This vicious cycle would be alleviated in part through ombudsmen who would be aware of system issues and appropriate living conditions while also understanding and having access to behavioral health care resources.

Please support LD 1009 with an "Ought to Pass" vote.