



Testimony of Whitney A. Parrish

**LD 488 – Ought To Pass**

**Resolve, To Expand Recovery Community Organizations Throughout Maine**

Health and Human Services Committee

April 12, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Whitney Parrish, and I am the Advocacy and Communications Director of Health Equity Alliance (HEAL). Health Equity Alliance is a nonpartisan nonprofit public health and harm reduction organization that envisions and works toward a world where all people are valued and celebrated, and where health justice is realized for everyone, regardless of who they are, where they come from, or what their lives look like.

I am writing to urge you to support LD 488 because we believe every Mainer in recovery, or seeking recovery, should have safe, stable, and supportive resources in their communities that will help them lead healthier lives and have connection so critical to their recovery journey—however that looks for them.

As I write this letter, I feel it is important to point out that, unlike many of the organizations you have heard from, HEAL is not, in fact, a recovery organization. We are a Harm Reduction service provider and advocacy organization. Our perspective begins with the idea that drug use is a reality, and we must do everything we can to mitigate the potential negative consequences of problematic or chaotic use.

As such, our primary focus is promoting evidence-based programs, policies, and practices that help people who are actively using drugs feel supported in making the best possible choices for themselves, their health, and their lives. When our clients feel supported in these ways, many will seek out treatment and recovery services, and another part of what we do at HEAL is to connect them with treatment and recovery programs if and when they are ready to engage them. We do not see this in conflict with the principles of our work and values; in fact, when someone makes that deeply personal choice for themselves without coercion, we know that's what health justice really looks like.



We support LD 488 because without places like recovery centers, especially in disconnected rural parts of Maine and my home county of Kennebec, we are not doing everything we can to support people seeking or in recovery. People who choose a pathway to recovery should have low-barrier, community-focused places where they feel safe, supported, and ready to start or continue their recovery journey.

People who have made the incredibly difficult and deeply personal choice to seek out recovery in their lives face struggles most people simply cannot imagine. It is time to recognize that access to support and meaningful connection to others who understand them and their experiences is fundamental to supporting Mainers in that process. I urge the committee to vote '**Ought to Pass**' on LD 488.

Thank you for your time and attention. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions for me.