

Dear Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Kate Pontius. I am a resident of Portland, ME and I am a current MSW student at the University of Maine in Orono. As an MSW student, I am taking a policy course that encourages students to engage in local policy and provide testimony for a bill that is relevant to the profession of social work. This testimony is written in favor of LD 488: A Resolve to Expand Recovery Community Organizations Throughout Maine.

Today, we must respond to a local epidemic alongside the global COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, there were 502 drug overdose deaths across our state. This is not a new issue, but one that has continued to impact our communities and counties for years. Substance use disorder (SUD) remains one of the most highly stigmatized conditions in our society, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only increased the degree to which individuals in recovery may feel socially isolated.

To help combat this stigma and increase support for individuals with a SUD, Recovery Community Centers (RCCs) have been implemented in many counties; but not all. Currently, Kennebec, York, Hancock, Waldo, Franklin, Somerset, and Piscataquis counties do not have access to a RCC, which can offer numerous services for individuals who are seeking support.

RCCs provide a safe, supportive space for individuals who are recovering from a SUD. These recovery centers also provide a space for individuals to get involved and give back with a purpose. Lastly, these centers address stigma by creating a space for communities to start a bigger conversation around SUD through advocacy and peer support.

With access to the support that RCCs provide, our communities can thrive. The Maine legislature should pass and fund LD 488 to open seven new RCCs in the counties that don't have one.