

TESTIMONY OF MEAGAN SWAY

**LD 488 – Ought To Pass**

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

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

April 12, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, greetings. My name is Meagan Sway, and I am Policy Director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine, a statewide organization committed to advancing and preserving civil liberties guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions. On behalf of our members, I submit this testimony in favor of LD 488. This bill would strengthen our response to Mainers struggling with substance use disorder and lessen our reliance on the criminal legal system.

Maine continues in the throes of a drug overdose crisis. More people died last year from drug overdoses than died from COVID-19, and the numbers in 2021 are on pace to be even worse.<sup>1</sup> We cannot continue business as usual; we must stop pouring money into our jails and prisons and underfunding treatment and supports that allow people to gain the stability needed for long-term recovery.

This bill is modest: it allocates \$1 million to be spread throughout the 7 counties in Maine that do not currently have recovery centers. These resources are desperately needed. In just the first two months of this year, we lost two Mainers from Franklin County, five from Hancock County, 12 from Kennebec County, one from Piscataquis County, three from Somerset County, three from Waldo County and 11 from York County, all to fatal drug overdoses.<sup>2</sup>

As a state, for decades we have underfunded mental and behavioral health services to the point where jails and prison are frequently cited as the best chance of a person to get “help.” But jails and prisons are not treatment facilities and any “treatment” found within their walls is less effective than treatment provided in the community. This committee has the power to correct some of the state’s overreliance

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://mainedrugdata.org/february-2021-monthly-overdose-report/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

on jails and prisons for substance use treatment. This bill is an important step in that direction.

The more we are able to provide treatment in the community, the less we will have to put into jails and prisons, and the healthier our citizens will be. We urge you to vote *ought to pass* on this important legislation.