

**Testimony for the 130<sup>th</sup> Session of the Maine Legislature  
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services**

**Testimony in favor of LD 1586, An Act To Strengthen Statewide Mental Health Peer Support, Crisis Intervention Mobile Response and Crisis Stabilization Unit Services and To Allow E-9-1-1 To Dispatch Using the Crisis System. Public Hearing, May 3, 2021**

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee On Health and Human Services, my name is Carter Friend and I live in Portland. I am submitting testimony in favor of LD 1586 on behalf of the Anti-Racist Policy Committee of HopeGateWay Church in Portland.

For years, we as a society have been asking the police to do too much. As the City of Portland Racial Equity Steering Committee stated in its Report issued last week:

*[The Committee] wholeheartedly agrees with Superintendent Police Chief David Brown who, while he was the Chief of Police the Dallas, Texas PD, was quoted as saying: “We are asking cops to do too much in this country...[.] We are. Every societal failure, we put it off on the cops to solve...[.] Policing was never meant to solve all those problems.” This sentiment was affirmed by the video created by the Portland Police Department, “Co-responding to Crisis,” where it is noted that approximately 65% of police work is responding to mental health crises, even when these crises do not involve criminal matters or behaviors.*

Although many officers may possess de-escalation skills, the mere presence of armed, uniformed officers with police vehicles responding to a mental health crisis can exacerbate feelings of distress and escalate mental health-related situations. This is particularly true in Black communities and other communities of color, where relationships with police are historically characterized by tension and distrust. (Vera Institute, *Behavioral Health Crisis Alternatives*)

This bill seeks to address that. Critically, it uses community-based solutions to address this problem. These include recognized best practices such as strengthening crisis/warm lines and their staff, strengthening mental health crisis intervention mobile response, expanding the use of mental health law enforcement officer liaisons, the use of 9-1-1 dispatch centers to dispatch crisis response, and strengthening mental health crisis stabilization unit services. Vitally, it also includes funding to increase awareness and understanding of these resources by undertaking a statewide public education campaign.

We believe these changes will create a much-needed transformation in the way we address mental health crises in Maine.

For these reasons, on behalf of the Anti-Racist Policy Committee of HopeGateWay Church in Portland, I strongly urge the passage of 1586. Thank you.