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Testimony of Rep. Richard Evans Introducing LD 1718, “An Act To Establish the Accidental Drug Overdose Death Review Panel”

May 21, 2021

Good morning Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. I am Representative Richard Evans, and I represent seven communities in Piscataquis County. I am here today to introduce LD 1718, “An Act To Establish the Accidental Drug Overdose Death Review Panel.”

As you are aware, overdose deaths are a very serious problem for Maine, and, as a state we need to be doing all we can to prevent them. In 2020, Maine recorded its worst year for drug overdoses with 504 deaths. Since January of this year, we continue to be on a sustained upward spike that has worsened since the start of the pandemic.

As a state, we are committed to doing everything we can to prevent this trend and its unfortunate effects on Maine families. One way to help prevent those deaths is to examine the circumstances in the victim’s life leading up to their death and see whether there were opportunities to change the trajectory of their lives and if so, what those opportunities were.

This sort of study is what commonly happens in other areas. For example, the state already has the Maternal, Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Panel which was established by statute in 2005 to study ways to reduce pregnancy-related deaths. Thirty-three other states already have similar panels to study overdose-related deaths, including New Hampshire which set theirs up last year.

This bill was already heard last year, but unfortunately work on it was halted due to the pandemic.

I will be followed by Gordon Smith, the state’s Director of Opioid Response, who will go into the background on this bill and answer any questions you may have.

Thank you very much for your consideration.