

Testimony in Favor of LD 1722 An Act to Ensure Access to All Paths to Recovery for Persons Affected by Opioids Using Money Obtained through Litigation Against Opioid Manufacturers

Dear Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Human Services Committee, and my neighbor, Representative Colleen Madigan,

My name is Winifred Tate, I am a resident of Waterville, an associate professor at Colby College, and director of the Maine Drug Policy Lab at Colby College. We are researching the impact of drug policies in local communities, and the experiences of women who use drugs and women in recovery.

To date, our research team has completed 20 interviews with incarcerated women in Aroostook and Kennebec county jails; 36 life history interviews with people in recovery or in active use; 16 interviews with law enforcement personnel, and 28 interviews with health care providers and recovery personnel.

I will not repeat the litany of statistics here to convince you that Maine is in crisis. You know that it is, as more Mainers die daily from drug overdoses than ever before, with thousands more continuing problematic drug use without access to the support and treatment that they need and want.

We have a consensus that problematic substance use and substance use disorder are public health problems, that require public health solutions. These solutions requiring funding, money for recovery centers, for treatment, for harm reduction approaches, for peer recovery coaches, and investments in community supports.

We have heard over and over again the critical role of finding community support as people seek and maintain recovery. And we have heard the tragic stories of lost years and damaged relationships when people could not find the support they needed because of lack of access to treatment and harm reduction resources, resulting in escalated problematic substance use and even overdose death.

The money coming into the state from the ongoing opioid litigation be maintained in a trust that will ensure that it is spent to repair the harm done by these opioid companies and prevent future harm by ongoing lack of treatment, harm reduction resources and support for people struggling with substance use disorder in the state.

This money must not be an excuse to maintain the funding status quo. The money should not replace existing funding, but be used to **expand** all pathways to recovery available to Mainers struggling with substance disorder.

This money must be managed by a commission that represents the full geographic, racial and recovery pathway diversity in the state, and that is directed by the health care professionals who are experts in public health approaches, by harm reduction providers who are the front line workers keeping people alive in Maine, and by recovery advocates who have the lived

experience and insights on what is needed in Maine communities to make all pathways to recovery available to all. I support the amendment as a step toward this.

We have the opportunity to create pathways to recovery that are desperately needed throughout the state.

We cannot miss this opportunity to transform Maine. Please vote ought to pass.

Thank you.

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Maine Drug Policy Lab at Colby College

The Maine Drug Policy Lab at Colby College brings together policymakers, scholars and students, providing evidence-based analysis for addressing critical drug policy issues in our state and beyond, and conducts research on problematic drug use and access to treatment in Maine.