

LD 779: An Act to Fund the Aroostook County Drug Treatment Court**Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary**

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine supports the passage of LD 753: An Act to Support an Aroostook Adult Treatment and Recovery Court. As an organization representing one in four Mainers diagnosed with a mental health condition each year and their families, and as the sole provider implementing Platinum Level Certified Crisis Intervention Teams across the state, we commend initiatives that support the diversion of individuals from the criminal justice system and support the treatment and recovery of our friends and neighbors.

NAMI Maine collected data regarding 315 mental health calls responded to by law enforcement in Aroostook County. One hundred and eighty-three of those individuals interacted with law enforcement on multiple occasions due to their behavioral health challenges, with 73 of those individuals interacting with law enforcement more than ten times in the previous six months. Of those calls, 49 individuals were arrested by law enforcement, with anecdotal statements from law enforcement reflecting that, at times, this was the only avenue they saw available to access treatment for the individual.

Research has indicated that Treatment Courts are a cost-effective practice to support individuals who are struggling with behavioral health challenges in communities, resulting in the intersection with the criminal justice system. Treatment courts have found that for every \$1 spent in this model, taxpayers average \$2-\$4 in savings, with some communities reporting as high as \$26. Long-term impacts of treatment courts demonstrate a significant reduction in recidivism rates for those who graduate from the program. For those who do experience recidivism, there is a minimal risk of escalation of crimes, which is correlated with employment rates, stable housing, and consistent case management services.¹

Maine is currently in a tenuous position regarding the behavioral health challenges facing our state, which has limited resources and services while also addressing fiscal challenges. Treatment courts are demonstrated to be cost-effective alternatives to incarceration, providing treatment and services while diverting from the higher and more costly levels of care of incarceration. Additionally, when implemented with fidelity, treatment courts assist individuals with building natural and sustainable support networks, resulting in higher success rates in long-term stability within the community setting. Because of this, NAMI Maine supports LD 753 and the work to provide recognized alternatives to incarceration and services to Aroostook County.

ABOUT NAMI MAINE: Incorporated in 1984, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine Chapter (NAMI Maine) is the state's largest grassroots mental health organization. With support from national and regional affiliates, the agency is dedicated to building better lives for everyone impacted by behavioral health concerns. NAMI Maine engages with leaders and community partners at all levels to improve the state's mental health system through collaboration and education.

¹ Estrellado, N. (2024, August 7). *National Drug Court Statistics: Trends, Outcomes, & Challenges* - Addiction Group. Addiction Group. <https://www.addictiongroup.org/resources/drug-court-statistics/>

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