

Written Testimony on

L.D. 1975, “An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs”

Presented by

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Committee on Health and Human Services

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Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

I am submitting testimony in opposition of the passage of LD 1975,” An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs”.

If passed as written this bill will allow the personal possession of up to 2 grams of heroin, 2 grams of fentanyl, 2 grams of cocaine, and 2 grams of methamphetamine to not be a criminal offense. The current street prices for these illicit dangerous drugs range from \$100 to \$150 per gram.

The decriminalization of the possession of illicit dangerous street drugs have had disastrous consequences for Oregon and British Columbia and if implemented in Maine it will be catastrophic. This concept should be a non-starter, and I strongly urge you to remove this part from the bill.

A comprehensive and impactful drug control strategy must invest in several realms that work in concert with each other to influence behaviors and promote positive changes. These realms are Education, Treatment, Recovery, and Enforcement. Historically we have erred by ignoring certain realms while going all in on others. Enforcement alone cannot get it done, removal of consequences and solely focusing on a public health care response will not get it done. It requires deliberate and pragmatic approaches.

Drug courts have had great successes as have Veteran courts, this is because they combine accountability along with guidance and support to help individuals overcome the barriers to recovery.

Sober housing has had great success, again there is accountability to do the right things in order to live there, whether that is to not commit crimes, attend treatment, participate in peer recovery support, and seek gainful employment.

This bill and its on-going deliberations can provide us with a unique opportunity to make a difference if we focus on the right investments. Here are some suggestions for your consideration:

- Increase programming in county jails to include access to peer recovery support, medication assisted therapy, and forming collective partnerships that will assist in connecting individuals with supports upon being released.
- Implement diversion programming for low level drug offenses from criminal justice system providing that the individual is willing to undergo assessment and will follow prescribed plan without new criminal conduct. In order for this to work the back-logs in the court system from Covid need to be cleared up, this will require investments in clerks and bailiffs to run courts at full capacity. A deferred disposition status on charges would act as a leverage point.
- Incentivize businesses to hire persons in recovery.
- Improve access to health care
- Promote transitional recovery housing
- Promote demand reduction through prevention education in schools
- Ensure that detox, treatment, and counselling services are available for those who want them and when it is needed
- Improve access to opportunities to education and vocational schools for those in recovery

Let's use this bill as a starting point to develop a comprehensive approach with investments that will have a meaningful positive impact. An approach that will incentivize people to want to move from addiction into recovery, that will require the resources to be in place for those ready and willing to accept help and do the hard work. It will also leverage consequences that provide a safeguard not only for individuals suffering from addiction but provide safeguards on the impact to all society.