



Testimony of Lorraine Brown, on behalf of NAMI Maine

In support of L.D. 1066 "An Act to Increase Access to Health Coverage and Qualify Maine for Federal Funding"

April 2, 2013

Senator Craven, Representative Farnsworth and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Lorraine Brown and I represent the National Alliance on Mental Illness in Maine or NAMI Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of L.D. 1066, "An Act to Increase Access to Health Coverage and Qualify Maine for Federal Funding".

NAMI Maine is a statewide organization that exists to improve the lives of all persons in Maine who are affected by mental illness through support, education and advocacy. NAMI Maine provides statewide programs for the support of families, youth and adults affected by mental illness.

NAMI Maine commends Representative Sanborn and all the co-sponsors for introducing this extremely critical piece of legislation before you today. I am honored to be here representing NAMI Maine and to be a member of the coalition Cover Maine Now.

NAMI Maine strongly supports this legislation because it not only makes economic sense for the State of Maine but it is clearly the right thing to do. You are hearing convincing testimony regarding the economics and healthcare necessities of this bill and why it should be passed out of the committee with your strong endorsement.

This legislation makes sense in part because more personal healthcare coverage would alleviate the very expensive visits to the emergency rooms which have been consistently used by 'at risk' individuals for primary care and mental health services.

We question why the State would want to target a population that is at highest risk and why the State would not want more Mainers to have health care coverage supported by federal dollars

Individuals with mental illness comprise a large component of this vulnerable group. Among those Mainers without insurance, we estimate that at least 24,000 of them are people who need mental health services. Access to these services will include behavioral health care. Gaining access to proper care and treatment will only support their recovery while preventing many with mental illness from falling through the cracks.

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Among the 7,000 veterans who could be covered with these federal funds, a significant proportion returns home with the invisible injuries of war. To provide them with a way to gain access to effective mental health treatment would potentially reduce suicide rates and help the veterans who serve our country to become reconnected with their communities and in turn may help them reenter the work force.

Finally, we have heard frequently about the disincentives for individuals to remove themselves from disability benefits and reenter the work force. Many individuals with mental illness receive either SSI or SSDI. One of the disincentives to leave these programs is the fear of losing one's healthcare benefits. Accepting these federal supporting dollars will help to decrease barriers for those individuals who want to consider working in some capacity. This bill will in part provide them with the opportunity for recovery and to move forward with their lives.

These are just a few of the reasons NAMI Maine is strongly advocating for this legislation. If you have any questions I would be glad to try to answer them or failing that I will find the answer for you when I leave this room.

Thank you for your time and this opportunity to provide testimony in support of L.D. 1066. We are hopeful that you will make the decision that supports the interests of all of Maine's citizens and vote in favor of this legislation.

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