

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



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Testimony Neither For nor Against LD 858 to the Committee on Judiciary April 22, 2021

Senator Carney, Representative Harnett, and distinguished members of the Committee.

My name is Peter Lehman and I live in Thomaston. I am a formerly incarcerated citizen and a person in long-term recovery.* I am testifying on behalf of the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition whose goal is to promote restorative practices in order to increase public safety and the health of our community.

I introduced myself as “a person in long-term recovery.” I’m thinking not only of my recovery from substance use disorder but my recovery from other addictions and from other mental health challenges. For more than 22 years.

I have benefitted from “recovery support services” and have long been a champion of recovery peer support centers. I am also a certified Recovery Coach. MPAC very much supports the intention of this bill. We support avoiding incarceration for mental health issues.

One of the issues for those struggling with substance use disorder has been the stigmatizing of this disease as moral weakness and criminality rather than as a mental health affliction.

Unfortunately, in attempting to confront this stigmatization and isolation, **this bill stigmatizes and isolates** those dealing with non-SUD mental health challenges.

When Mary Ellen Copeland developed the idea of Wellness Recovery Action Plans in 1997, she was not thinking of Substance Use Disorder. Now, WRAP is an evidence-based approach that is

* In the interest of honesty and disclosure, a personal background statement is available on request.

also widely used in the substance use treatment and peer support community.

It is time we stop compartmentalizing and pretending that some of us have a better or morally superior mental health challenge than others.

Many of the people MPAC and the Maine Prisoner Reentry Network encounter and support are recovering from a variety of trauma-induced mental health issues. Moreover, there is a strong and vibrant mental health peer support community that includes peer support for those with SUD. It makes no sense to create another community that excludes those without SUD.

We strongly recommend that the bill not be restricted to a single mental health issue but be amended so that the definition of "recovery" includes other mental health challenges:

"Recovery" means a process of change through which a person with substance use disorder and/or other mental health issues improves the person's health and wellness, lives a self-directed life and strives to reach the person's full potential.

We also recommend that the definition of "recovery residence" be expanded to include other mental health challenges.

Recovery residence" means a shared living residence for persons recovering from substance use disorder and/or other mental health issues

In short, we support the concept and the intention and hope you can correct these significant flaws.

Thank you very much for your attention and support.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.