

POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT

LD 377: An Act to Create a County Jail Drug Rehabilitation and Treatment Grant Program

Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
Wednesday, March 15 2017

Jails are becoming some of the largest providers of mental health and substance abuse services in the state. Equipping jails to manage the treatment needs of inmates requires collaboration with treatment providers in the community who specialize in the field of behavioral health. NAMI Maine supports the concept proposed in LD 377, and would like to bring this effort into perspective while also making some suggested additions to the language of the bill.

The system of services that exists in the community to treat substance use disorder is currently a high priority for the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and this legislature. The joint standing committee on Health and Human Services will be hearing a number of bills this session about increasing funding and access to evidence-based treatment for substance use disorders, specifically opioid addiction. Additional attention will be given to bolstering prevention and peer recovery services within this field. NAMI Maine supports any efforts to make intentional, evidence-based improvements to the system of care that is available in the community for people and families impacted by substance use disorders. Unfortunately, the jails have limited access to these community resources when it comes to meeting the needs of people in their care.

There are two different populations within jails who need substance use treatment. The first are those who have committed serious crimes and simultaneously struggle with addiction or substance use. The second are those individuals who have committed misdemeanor offenses that are intricately tied to their struggle with addiction. With some alterations made to the development process and oversight, this bill can be a positive resource for the former population. Having a drug rehabilitation center under the Department of Corrections will allow for recovery to begin before inmates are released.

In order for the proposed rehabilitation and treatment programs to be effective it is critical that the department seek the advice of existing treatment providers and recovery services in designing the program. The statewide associations of county commissioners and sheriffs are both critical decision makers in ensuring these resources are sent to the areas with highest need; the voice from existing

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treatment and recovery systems is necessary when looking at performance standards and reviews of efficacy for the program.

Diversion of individuals who have committed a misdemeanor crime directly related to their substance use disorder, such as operating under the influence, needs an equal amount of attention from the DOC, County Commissioners and Sheriff's across the state. Nationally, these entities have come together with the American Psychiatric Association under The Stepping Up Initiative to identify best practices for engaging committed leaders in each county, identifying and tracking people in jail who have a mental illness or substance use disorder, and utilizing data from across the state to improve funding, programming and policing. The goal being to build better bridges between the jails and the community resources, not to recreate a treatment system within the department of corrections.

NAMI Maine does not want to support a system where treatment for substance use disorder is most easily accessed by being arrested. Additional questions we would encourage this committee to consider as you discuss LD 377 are: How will service providers within these short or long-term residential drug rehabilitation and treatment facilities be chosen? Who from the inmate population will be identified as eligible for treatment within these facilities? How will services be transitioned as people are released from DOC custody? And most importantly, how will DOC continue to prioritize diverting those individuals who need treatment and not jail time?

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, education and common ground.*

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