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THE MAINE SENATE
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Testimony in Support of LD 1596
An Act to Facilitate the Creation of an Aroostook County Drug Treatment Court

Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
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Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Troy Jackson. I serve as President of the Maine Senate and proudly represent Aroostook County in the Legislature. I am here today to present LD 1596, "An Act to Facilitate the Creation of an Aroostook County Drug Treatment Court."

At this point, there is almost no corner of the state that has not been impacted by the opioid crisis. It has devastated families and communities in both rural and non-rural parts of the state, and landed many folks in our criminal justice system. Maine Treatment and Recovery Courts are designed as options for individuals whose interaction with the criminal justice system is largely due to substance use disorder.

Maine currently offers treatment and recovery courts in Androscoggin, Cumberland, Hancock, Penobscot, Washington, and York counties. The legislation before you would lay the foundation for the establishment of a treatment and recovery court in Aroostook County. It seeks to ensure that Aroostook County residents with substance abuse disorder have the option to participate in this type of program when dealing with the criminal justice system.

In order to participate in a treatment and recovery court program, individuals are required to live in the county in which the court sits. If a participant does not live in one of the six counties, they must have reliable transportation to meet with a case manager and the required Court Team. You do not have to have a map of the state of Maine to understand how far away any of the present Treatment and Recovery Courts are located from Aroostook County towns. The closest treatment is in Calais. Calais is 189 miles away from Fort Kent; 132 miles from Presque Isle; 145 miles from Caribou; and 91 miles from Houlton.

The establishment of one Assistant District Attorney position is critical in getting this type of court up and running. These are specialty dockets for eligible persons whose involvement in the criminal justice system is predicated on the use of drugs and/or alcohol.

The participants have serious substance abuse disorders and must enter a plea agreement and accept responsibility for their conduct. The program is intensive. It requires comprehensive treatment and supervision. There is strict accountability and sanctions for missteps. Major requirements of this program are weekly meetings, drug testing, curfews, and education. The treatment and recovery team that manages the day-to-day operations of the court is multi-disciplinary and requires a prosecutor. For a treatment and recovery court to be successful, it needs a dedicated, full-time prosecutor. LD 1596 will make this a reality for Aroostook County.

If we are serious about combating the opioid epidemic and helping Mainers get their lives back on track, we need to use every tool available. Establishing a treatment and recovery court in Aroostook County is one important tool.

Thank you for your time today. I hope you will join me in supporting this proposal. I'd be happy to answer any questions I can.