



Position Statement: LD 1030

*“An Act to Better Coordinate the Work of Mental Health Crisis Agencies
with Local Law Enforcement”*

Through partnerships spanning over a decade with local law enforcement agencies and community mental health providers to implement the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Training model, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), Maine chapter is dedicated to building strong bridges between these two systems. As a result of de-institutionalization and the reduction of inpatient treatment options across the nation, there has been an increase in the number of individuals with a mental illness having contact with the criminal justice system. The reduction in beds was not followed by the necessary investment in and development of community-based resources. A direct result has been that law enforcement reports being called to the same home dozens of times for individuals with untreated mental illnesses. In some parts of the state, law enforcement is able to work in partnership with local crisis agencies, but there are parts of the state where those partnerships are fragile or do not exist.

While many members of law enforcement recognize that the criminal justice system is not the appropriate place for individuals to receive treatment, they often find themselves forced to take action after repeated visits to the same situation. The development of a model containing multifaceted protocol, outlining a process for effective communication between law enforcement and crisis agencies, will create formal bridges. The relationship between these entities in every jurisdiction across Maine is vital to the well-being of the many individuals affected by mental health challenges and to the maintenance of appropriate responses to all involved in crisis situations.

NAMI Maine continues to fully support an effort to develop a model memorandum of understanding (MOU) that would outline how and when law enforcement shares information with the local DHHS-funded crisis agency as well as placing specific expectations for appropriate actions on each entity. No one intends law enforcement to function as a mental health provider and the mental health system cannot be the criminal justice system. What is necessary is a strong bridge that prevents these two groups of professionals from operating in silos that do not meet the needs of the individuals they serve.

NAMI Maine is our state’s largest grassroots support, education and advocacy organization committed to the issue of mental illness. With seven affiliates and hundreds of members, NAMI Maine is an active voice for the families, individuals and professionals whose daily lives are impacted by mental illness. www.namimaine.org