



Position in Support of LD 1526

“An Act to Permit Disclosure of Certain Intelligence and Investigative Record Information by a Criminal Justice Agency to a Nongovernmental Advocacy Program for Persons with a Mental illness”

The National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine Chapter (NAMI Maine) is committed to ensuring that members of law enforcement have the tools necessary to successfully interact with individuals facing a mental health crisis. Individuals with mental illness are coming into contact with law enforcement officers at increasingly higher rates. The public safety system is stressed with increasing calls and reduced availability of community-based mental health resources.

Utilizing agencies with the mission of mental health related support and advocacy, law enforcement would be able to provide enhanced outreach and support to individuals in need. Members of law enforcement encounter many individuals and families who are living with a mental health issue without accessing support or education services. Often times, law enforcement will visit the same homes numerous times for cases involving a mental health issue. These calls often do not involve a criminal complaint or the need for protective custody. Some of these calls meet the acuity of need for crisis mental health agency response, resources permitting, but the vast majority of calls do not involve arrest, protective custody or a crisis agency response. In those cases, law enforcement needs an ally.

The purpose of LD 1526 is to allow law enforcement entities, if they so choose, to provide phone numbers and names to a mental health advocacy entity that is not a provider of mental health clinical services. The purpose of this partnership is not to share health information or deliver treatment services; rather it is to allow a warm hand-off to an entity that can engage in outreach by offering resources and a supportive ear to an individual or family member impacted by mental health needs. Such outreach could include a simple wellness-check call to determine if the individual or family member is interested in talking about the situation in order to identify potential resources. The goal is to reduce repeat visits by law enforcement and shorten the amount of time that lapses before individuals or family members get connected to the education, support or resources that best meet their needs.

While the legislation does not name specific entities with whom law enforcement could communicate, the concept was developed as a result of NAMI Maine’s desire to work in closer partnership with the State Police. The simple goal of this legislation is to outline an option for law enforcement as they work to meet the growing mental health needs of the communities they serve.