

Position Statement: LD 1537

“An Act to Combat Drug Addiction through Enforcement, Prevention, Treatment and Recovery”

NAMI Maine strongly supports increasing access to state-funded mental health services that do not require health insurance. According to the most recent reports of the Maine Shared Community Health Needs Assessments: 10.4% of Mainers are uninsured (Kaiser Family Foundation has this estimate at 13%) and 11% are unable to obtain or delay obtaining necessary medical care due to cost. Additionally, Mainers across the state struggle to find treatment for substance use disorders. Mental health diagnoses impact one in four Mainers, and substance use disorders are one of the most common illnesses to go untreated. In 2012-13, about one in seven 18 to 25 year olds needed but did not receive treatment for alcohol; nearly one in ten needed but did not receive treatment for illicit drug use. Young adults were about three times as likely to be perceived as needing but not receiving treatment for alcohol compared to those who were 26 and older.

For over a decade, NAMI Maine has co-lead a mental health and jail diversion coalition in Penobscot County. The coalition has addressed many issues impacting the Penobscot County Jail as well as the greater Bangor area, including the lack of a detox center for individuals with substance use disorders. In the absence of a detox center, the responsibility of treatment falls to the jail – a role that lacks the professional and financial resources to adequately fulfill. Creating a detox center would offer a transition from detoxing to treatment, preparing individuals to access substance use services.

Increasing services that promote recovery from substance use disorders is a critical need in the State of Maine. LD 1537 begins to address this by supporting the creation of a detox center in Bangor, increasing support for peer recovery centers and greater access to residential treatment centers and outpatient treatment for individuals who are uninsured. But, it lacks an inclusive approach that allows for funding for jails or public health outreach. If such a bill is to move forward, it must do more.

Peer-run recovery centers provide a safe place to find support and resources that assist in recovery. Individuals with lived experience who provide peer support are the cornerstone of any comprehensive approach to mental health treatment. Increasing funding to support the operation of peer-run recovery centers is a concept that NAMI Maine strongly supports. However, NAMI Maine believes that standards for these centers should be established and funding should be distributed through a competitive contracting process, administered by the Department of Health and Human Services.

NAMI Maine also advocates that LD 1488, *An Act To Establish the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion Program in Maine*, be amended as part of LD1537 to create a more comprehensive approach by diverting those charged with low-level drug crimes into treatment. We also urge that any funding for increased access to mental health treatment and support be distributed to areas of need demonstrated by data and in a manner that ensures use of evidence-based practices.

NAMI Maine is the state's largest grassroots, mental health advocacy organization. Sustained by seven affiliates and thousands of supporters across the state, NAMI Maine is an active voice for the families, individuals and professionals whose daily lives are impacted by mental illness.