

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Cross State Office Building, Room 209
Augusta, ME 04333

RE: LD 1871, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Task Force to Address the Opioid Crisis in the State Regarding Respectful Language

Dear Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

I am Randy Morrison, Director of Peer Services at Maine Behavioral Healthcare, and I am writing today in support of LD 1871, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Task Force to Address the Opioid Crisis in the State Regarding Respectful Language.

Maine Behavioral Healthcare provides a continuum of behavioral health care to a variety of Mainers, including those with substance use disorder. As Director of Peer Services, I oversee MBH's peer support programs, which are staffed by people in recovery from mental health, substance use, or co-occurring disorders. At our Peer Support Centers we have met countless participants who are desperately seeking understanding, compassion, and support in order to grow in their recovery. Many have internalized stigma and feel that our communities don't care about them or see them as human. We combat that by striving to use language that is inclusive, welcoming, recovery-oriented, and free of the judgement and shaming that is all too often a reality for those with mental health or substance use disorders. We don't do this just because it's the right thing to do, which it is, but we do it because it creates a space that encourages others to ask for help, to reach out when they are struggling, and ultimately experience great stability and fewer relapses.

As William White wrote, "Words have immense power to wound or heal. The right words catalyze personal transformation and offer invitations to citizenship and community service. The wrong words stigmatize and dis-empower."

When we use terms like "substance abuse," we are complicit in labeling people suffering from an illness as "abusers." This makes them feel more shame, less connected, and less willing to reach out for help. With that said, I applaud the Task Force to Address the Opioid Crisis for recommending this change in terminology. This bill is a commonsense approach to address a long-awaited need to create a system that uses respectful language AND language that accurately describes the illness. Substance use disorders are a medical condition that requires treatment and ongoing support. Let's not further exacerbate the stigma people with substance use disorder experience by choosing to describe them as abusers.

By supporting LD 1871, you have the ability to promote hope and reduce stigma. If we intend to create a community that encourages people to seek peer support and treatment, then we first need



to talk about how we use inclusive and welcoming language. This bill is a fundamental component of how we foster a culture of recovery.

For these reasons, I urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1871. Please feel free to contact me should need additional information or if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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Maine Behavioral Healthcare
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