

Testimony Regarding
LD 239: Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services To Explore
the Development of a Behavioral Health Unit at the Cumberland County Jail

before the
Health and Human Services Committee
129th Maine State Legislature
April 19, 2019

presented by
Brooklin R. Jones
(918) 344 – 7844
brooklin.jones@maine.edu
Master in Social Work Candidate
School of Social Work
University of Maine

Good morning Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson, and members of the health and human services committee, thank you for my time to testify. I am here to state my support for LD 239. My name is Brooklin Jones. I am a University of Maine Master's of Social Work candidate and resident of Orono.

It is easy to see only the act individuals have committed against others and society that brought them to jail. I ask you also find some compassion for the individuals because the stories behind why individuals have made those terrible choices might break your heart. The stories of abuse, neglect, death, addiction, sexual assault, and lack of basic physiological needs. Unaddressed trauma combined with barriers to re-entry into society will continue to increase recidivism and something needs to be done to break this cycle to allow for no new victims, crimes, and jail sentences. Something needs to happen to allow these individuals a chance to be productive Mainers. Allowing for a mental health facility in Cumberland County is a step towards that.

At a federal level, 80% of inmates had either mental health or substance abuse problems. In, Maine, "Forty-one percent of state prisoners and 48% of jail inmates had both. ... Forty percent of prisoners take psychotropic medications (Tapley, 2018)." These rates have been estimated to be higher in Maine but can only be estimated because under some policies individuals need to have already had a diagnosis or medication prior to being there (Ricker, 2016). As a future practitioner, I want and believe all individuals have the right to treatment.

As a child of someone who faces unaddressed mental illness, I implore you to consider the outcomes that could happen if mental illness can be addressed early. If my father had the opportunity to address his trauma and subsequent addiction, I wonder what

our relationship would be like. I may not have had to make the decision to have the police take him away when he was hallucinating and didn't recognize me when I was in my college home. I may not have had to have supervised visits my entire childhood. I can only wonder what our relationship would look like. My story isn't unique. My story is one of many you could hear here. Despite all of the stories, imagine the quality of life, the resources, and gain Maine could have if these stories weren't happening. This is why Maine needs a systemic change and Cumberland County Jail is a start.

Thank you Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson, and members of the committee for your consideration and I hope you will support LD 239 and the needed mental health assistance in the Cumberland County Jail. I welcome any questions that you may have on this legislation.

References

Ricker, N. (2016, Feb 20). From hospitals to jails: How Maine's mentally ill are still institutionalized. *Bangor Daily News*. Retrieved from <https://bangordailynews.com/2016/02/20/health/from-hospitals-to-jails-how-maines-mentally-ill-are-still-institutionalized/>

Tapley, L. (2018). The criminalization of the mentally ill in maine. *Prison Legal News*. Retrieved from <https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/2018/mar/7/criminalization-mentally-ill-maine/>