

## Testimony in Support of LD 1711, Resolve, To Save Lives by Establishing a Homeless Opioid Users Service Engagement Pilot Project within the Department of Health and Human Services

January 17, 2018

Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson, and Distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Ronald Jarrett, and I am the Director, Public Policy & Advocacy at United Way of Greater Portland (UWGP). I am here today testifying in support of LD 1711 on behalf of UWGP.

Thrive2027 is our community's commitment to make Greater Portland stronger for everyone who calls it home. Spearheaded by United Way of Greater Portland, 175 business, non-profit, public, and community organizations have endorsed three 10-year goals that promise measurable and meaningful change in Greater Portland. These three goals are:

- Goal 1: More children have a strong start in school so that they are reading at grade level by the end of third grade. By 2027, we aim to have 70% of children reading at grade level by the end of third grade; currently, only 59% of Cumberland County children read proficiently at the end of third grade.
- Goal 2: More people have the education and employment opportunities they need to be able to live and work in Greater Portland. By 2027, we aim to have 70% of households paying less than 30% of their income on housing; currently, 65% of Cumberland County households pay less than 30% of their income on housing.
- Goal 3: More of our neighbors live longer, healthier lives. By 2027, we are aiming for a 10% reduction in preventable premature deaths.

It is this third goal that brings us here today. In 2010, 187 substance induced deaths happened in Maine; by 2017, that number rose to 378. We are losing at least one person a day to substance use. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, substance use is a significant contributor to premature death for individuals in Cumberland County between the ages of 15 and 44. And Opioid use is increasing rapidly among those experiencing homelessness. Individuals experiencing homelessness are 9 times more likely to die from overdose than those who are stably housed. Also, it is important to note that the average age of drug related deaths is 41. We are losing people prematurely who would otherwise be contributing to their families, communities, and our great State. These deaths are preventable.

Community stakeholders adopted Goal 3 for many reasons, including that data, as mentioned earlier, shows that substance use is a significant cause of death. When launching Thrive2027, UWGP also held community conversations, talking with almost 2,200 people in person or via email. The harmful effects of substance use and the need to engage in prevention efforts were a recurring theme throughout many of those conversations. As the report summarizing those conversations noted, "Participants noted that substance use and addiction, particularly opiate use, cuts across boundaries of age, income, and geographical location."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "The Voice of the Community," available at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5757120ff85082e5b52038ec/t/588b67da2994ca9f3986079c/1485531099473/Community+Conversation+White+Paper+Final.pdf>.

Ensuring that our friends, family, and fellow Mainers receive mental health and substance use treatment, and a protective environment that reduces access to substances and lethal means, will help reduce the risk of these preventable premature deaths. Evidence-based, peer reviewed research shows that Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) and stable housing are integral and critical components of treatment that leads to recovery.

LD 1711 provides for these components and at the very least could help several Mainers make it another year and be on the road towards thriving in our communities. For these reasons, we encourage you to support LD 1711.

Thank you for your leadership and service.