



BANGOR CITY COUNCIL

CITY OF BANGOR

Testimony of Ben Sprague
Councilor, City of Bangor

Before the Health and Human Services Committee
FY 20-21 Budget
March 25, 2019

Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Ben Sprague and I am a member of the Bangor City Council and a two-time former Council Chair. I am here today to speak in support of LD 993: An Act to Expand Recovery Support Services Offered in Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties and the Greater Bangor Region to Improve Access, Treatment and Recovery for Those Affected by Substance Use Disorder by Designating a Regional Peer Supported Recovery Center.

Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties are facing a crisis that indeed challenges our entire state and nation. It is a public health crisis, the most significant of our generation. It is a crisis of the human spirit, destroying lives and destabilizing families, friendships, and relationships. And increasingly so, it is an economic crisis, contracting the labor force, costing Maine people, employers, and the economy of Maine many millions of dollars each year in foregone wages and lost productivity. Beyond the human toll, there are significant annual costs to municipalities, the state, and society as a whole through the costs of healthcare, courts and jails, and law enforcement and ambulance services.

The Bangor Region has been very proactive in taking on these challenges. From the Community Health Leadership Board to the Substance Abuse Task Force to many smaller working groups and support networks, formal and informal, we have been working together. Those in the healthcare community are sitting around the same table with those in law enforcement as well as with those in the treatment and recovery communities including men and women in long-term recovery themselves.

Increasingly so, the discussions at these tables are made up of the family members of those who have been lost: parents who have lost a child, children without a parent, husbands and wives who will never be able to fill the void of their lost loved ones but who are searching together for ways to make sure this doesn't happen to others.

But there is still one major missing piece in the equation. We all want to get people to what I have heard Bruce Campbell from Wellspring and the BARN refer to as "that promised land of recovery." Long-term recovery is the goal, but there are precious few resources to help people get there and stay there.

Three years ago the City of Bangor received a Maine Health Access Foundation Grant to study and identify gaps in services. What was identified was the need to address recovery coaching and support for those newly in recovery. This includes being able to meet people where they are,

sometimes quite literally, at that crucial moment when they are ready to take that first and most significant step towards recovery. These moments are sometimes in emergency rooms, courthouses or jails, or on the very streets of Bangor and Brewer and the surrounding communities. If you cannot get to that person at that moment of clarity when they are ready for recovery, the opportunity might not come again until it is too late.

The BARN, or Bangor Area Recovery Network, has been at the forefront of this work for the last decade. The BARN is a safe place for people to go. They are a convener of support groups for those in treatment and recovery as well as for the families that are impacted by substance use disorder. And they are an advocate for better understanding, reduced stigmatization, and the need to prioritize recovery in our policies and budgetary decisions. The BARN has been recognized far and wide as a beacon of hope for countless people in Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties and beyond and was even recently honored by the Bangor Region Chamber of Commerce. This is despite the fact that the BARN has no permanent funding source, no formal director, and a limited staff. To use a boxing term, they are punching far beyond their weight class; the impact of the BARN is many times greater than what you would expect for an organization operating on such a shoestring budget.

This is a crisis. And we must face it head on with compassionate hearts, a supportive attitude to our neighbors and family members who are struggling, and with our budgetary decisions and investments. We need a formal, full time, properly funded recovery center in Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties. It is time for us to lift up the work of the BARN, to stand behind the men and women who have been doing this work for the last decade, and to turbo charge their work so they can do more. An investment in these recovery services in Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties will pay off many times over for the region and indeed the entire state of Maine. Thank you.



CITY OF BANGOR

PATY HAMILTON
DIRECTOR

PUBLIC HEALTH & COMMUNITY SERVICES

Testimony in Support of LD 993
FY 20-21 Budget
March 25, 2019

Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson, and members of Health and Human Services Committee this letter is submitted in support of LD 993; *An Act To Expand Recovery Support Services Offered in Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties and the Greater Bangor Region To Improve Access, Treatment and Recovery for Those Affected by Substance Use Disorder by Designating a Regional Peer Supported Recovery Center* is much needed and long overdue.

The City of Bangor has worked closely with area non-profits to support and promote the activities of the Bangor Area Recovery Network, the BARN, since its inception. Initial support included holding original meetings at the health department to establish the BARN. The BARN is a grassroots organization supported only by local donations and many volunteer hours. This group fills an essential role in addressing substance use disorder as people move from substance use to treatment and eventual recovery. Investment in the BARN will yield results benefitting workforce and employment as well as individuals and their families for future generations. Currently the BARN does not have a paid director and relies on its board of directors and volunteers to complete its vision and mission.

Three years ago, the Bangor Public Health Department received a Maine Health Access Foundation grant to identify gaps in services and community needs. After a several year process including community input, we mutually decided to address the gap of recovery coaching. Since that time, a member of our health department has been providing support and technical assistance toward the creation of a Recovery Coaching program in our region. Our community and the state would reap the benefits of a more robust program if this funding became available. One benefit of having a consistent reliable funding stream would be enhancing the BARN's ability to more quickly deploy this fledgling recovery coaching program to area hospitals and non-profits connecting vulnerable people with recovery supports and services.

The Community Health Leadership Board comprised of healthcare, hospital, social service and public health CEOs is ready and eager to include recovery coaches as members of their team in all its partner organizations. CHLB is currently working on creating community-wide discharge plans, and the inclusion of the BARN and all its activities is a critical element in these plans. This funding would provide the necessary stability to ensure consistent program and operations. We know reaching out at critical times is essential to helping people move from use to treatment and recovery.

The City of Bangor wholeheartedly supports the mission of offering a complete array of substance free activities and support to individuals and families as they strive to achieve recovery knowing there are many pathways to recovery and that recovery is a community responsibility. Our community and the state would reap the benefits of a more robust Peer Recovery Support Program if this funding became available.

We urge your support and passage of LD 933.