



**Testimony Before the Joint Standing Committee on
Health and Human Services on LD 20**

An Act to Improve Substance Abuse Treatment

April 24, 2015

Senator Brakey, Representative Gattine, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Paul Nicklas and I am the Assistant City Solicitor for the City of Bangor. I am testifying on behalf of the City of Bangor in support of LD 20, An Act to improve Substance Abuse Treatment.

The support from the City of Bangor grows out of the significant efforts the Bangor community has been making to improve drug treatment and recovery in the City and the surrounding region. To help you understand the efforts of that community, I have provided a copy of a report generated by the Substance Abuse Working Group in Bangor which is slated to be adopted by the Bangor City Council as its formal recommendations on Monday.

LD 20 would re-establish a drug court in the City of Bangor. A former Bangor drug court was discontinued in 2011 due to lack of funding, and the City is very interested in having this program reinstated.

I first learned about drug courts in the course of a prosecution clinic I participated in during law school in Virginia. As I recall, one of course requirements was to visit a drug court, and I ended up in conversation with someone who worked with the court. He said the drug court cost about \$6000 per person per year, compared with \$20,000 for incarceration, and that the drug court was four times more effective than prison at preventing recidivism. Three times cheaper and four times as effective. If we even approach those numbers in Maine, that would be a pretty great deal.

Substance abuse and in particular opiate abuse are significant issues for Bangor. Unfortunately, the current system and lack of jail space has hindered the City's ability to deal effectively with substance abuse. The revolving door at the jail for low level drug offenders, many searching for opportunities to get clean, has created a substantial market for outside drug dealers. Drug court has the benefit of remaining punitive while also offering diversion as an incentive to get off drugs and remain off drugs. We simply do not have the police force,



prosecutors, or jail space to arrest, detain, and prosecute low level drug users. Reinstatement of drug court offers an opportunity to incentivize those who want to get sober but holds them accountable should they not.

It is for these reasons that the City of Bangor urges this committee to pass LD 20. Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.