



*Strengthening a Remarkable City, Building a Community for Life*

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Portland Police Department  
Michael J. Chitwood  
Chief of Police

March 2, 2005

Senator John M. Nutting  
79 Campbell Road  
Leeds, Maine 04263

Re: LD 151, An Act to Improve the Delivery of Maine's Mental Health Services

Dear Senator Nutting:

I am writing in support of LD 151, An Act to Improve the Delivery of Maine's Mental Health Services. This bill is a proactive step towards addressing the mental health crisis in the State of Maine and provides a vital alternative to the traditional mental health committal process. Assisted outpatient treatment allows for court-ordered treatment for individuals who have a history of treatment noncompliance. Assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) has proven effective in reducing the incidence of homelessness, arrests, incarcerations, victimization and violence among persons suffering from mental illness.

Portland Police Officers respond to approximately 400-600 calls for service involving mentally ill individuals each year. These calls can range from a homeless person passed out on a city street to a homicide and they are the most difficult calls an officer handles. Officers are often forced to take enforcement action when what the person really needs is treatment. In 2003, the Portland Police Department implemented the Crisis Intervention Team, which is a group of certified officers trained specifically in the identification, handling and disposition of individuals exhibiting signs of mental health crisis. The primary goal of the CIT is to ensure a proper response to persons in crisis through the use of skills involving the identification of types of mental health crisis and the de-escalation of those situations. This bill would be an invaluable aid to the CIT officers who are the first-responders during a mental health crisis.

Public safety resources are stretched to the breaking point reacting to people with severe mental illnesses. Maine's current civil commitment law prevents law enforcement officers from helping a person who refuses treatment for mental illness until that person becomes ill to the point of being a danger to themselves or others. In July 2004, officers responded to a stabbing of an 11-year old child whose mother stabbed her to "save her from a curse." In another case, a man committed suicide in front of officers at a traffic stop after his young son died of an accidental drug overdose. Drivers in Portland, South Portland and neighboring communities had an unusually long commute home during one