



**Testimony of Nelson Durgin, Mayor of the City of Bangor Before the
Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health
and Human Services
in Opposition to Budget Recommendations That Eliminate
Reimbursements for Methadone over the Biennium**

March 5, 2014

Senator Hamper, Senator Brakey, Representative Gattine, Representative Rotundo and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services. my name is Nelson Durgin and I am testifying today on behalf of the City of Bangor in opposition to the budget proposal that eliminates the reimbursement for methadone treatment over a two year period. However, the City wholeheartedly supports a reimbursement model that supports more counseling and an increase in the use of suboxone and vivitrol in medication assisted treatment.

As you may or may not be aware, the Bangor Community has spent and undergone a significant community process to identify ways to mitigate issues of opiate abuse in our community. Participation in this process included the CEO's of the three major hospitals, CEO's from other health and social service organizations, police, medical community, substance abuse counselors, providers, users and general public. What we learned was that there were significant barriers to obtaining alternative treatments to methadone and counseling. The most notable barrier is that the provider infrastructure does not exist to absorb these patients within the one-two year period. Cultural changes need to occur within the primary care practices and rural communities to help absorb the 1500+ methadone patients currently seeking treatment in Bangor. Based on Federal Statutes, that would amount to 150 new doctors, which is significant number for our area in Maine.

The City is keenly aware that the concentration of drugs and methadone in Bangor is troublesome. We also share the Governor's concern that there is too much methadone in our region. I do not think that it is a secret that the citizens of Bangor, the Bangor PD, and the City Council would prefer that Methadone was not part of our community. Nonetheless, we are concerned for our community if those dependent on methadone are no longer able to obtain treatment.



With all that said, we would like to share with you some of the good things that are happening in Bangor to address opiate addiction and the explosive growth of medication assistance treatment.

1. Ken Schmidt, CEO for Penobscot Community Health Center has convened a group of providers representing a cross section of the medical community including Eastern Maine and St. Joseph's to develop a protocol for the prescribing of opiates and other addictive drugs such as benzodiazepam within their medical practices. The hope is to come to an agreement on how opiates and other addicting substances will be prescribed within their practices and to curb "doctor shopping."
2. Dan Coffey, CEO of Acadia Hospital has convened the methadone providers in the community to discuss best practices and develop protocols for prescribing methadone and suboxone.
3. Mary Prybylo, CEO of St. Joseph's Healthcare will be convening a group to evaluate different models across the country for the delivery of medication assisted treatment and try to develop a model that would provide for medication assisted treatment in the rural areas and among medical practices that would allow for folks to receive treatment closer to their homes and employment. The administration of suboxone is a good example of this

I am attaching a copy of the committee's final report outlining recommendations for dealing with the opiate issue in Bangor. There are many other initiatives that came from this process and we are very proud of the fact that the medical providers, social service providers, and community have come together to problem solve around this issue.

At this time my primary concern is that the elimination of methadone in two years will result in a number of people who are in need of methadone who will be unable to access other treatments due to the shortage of providers. Concerning to our Police Chief is that it has the potential to lead to an even greater escalation of crime and illegal drug trade. As a community with the highest number of methadone patients in the state, we implore you to remove that provision in the budget which eliminates methadone in two years. Further we ask that the Governor and the legislature work with the City to develop needed treatment alternatives to folks having to obtain methadone in Bangor.

Thank you for your time and consideration on these important matters. For additional Information, please feel free to contact any of the following municipal officials:

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