POSITION STATEMENT IN OPPOSITION

LD 968: Resolve, To Expand Mental Health Crisis Intervention Mobile Response Services
Presented to Maine’s Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

As the state’s largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine opposes the passage of *Resolve, To Expand Mental Health Crisis Intervention Mobile Response Services*. NAMI Maine strongly supported the passage of LD 803: An Act To Create 4 Regional Mental Health Receiving Centers in 2019-2020. Receiving Centers, or Behavioral Health Crisis Center Services has been recognized as a national best practice in supporting individuals in the least restrictive section. This model has been found to divert individuals from the criminal justice system and other higher and more costly levels of care. Diverting funds that were previously allocated for this cost effective and best practice service towards a system that requires additional resources and supports will not create a robust and sustainable system.

Maine has followed the national trend of reducing psychiatric hospital beds without increasing access to community based providers. While we no longer hold individuals for decades in psychiatric hospitalization, we have replaced that form of institutionalization with holding record number of people with mental illness within the corrections system: 70-80% of county jail inmates are on mental health medication as is 60% of DOC's population. At the onset of the pandemic, initial data collected from some police departments across the state demonstrate that 50% of the mental health calls, they were responding to initiated from crisis services. Those numbers have since decreased, however continue to be a large percentage of their referrals. NAMI Maine acknowledges that the crisis services have struggles with receiving appropriate and sustainable funding. However the behavioral health receiving centers have been demonstrated in other parts of the state as a cost effective and supportive alternative.

As the pandemic has continued, it is clear that the risk for mental health crises have increased significantly. However utilizing funding previously appropriated for a cost effective and best practice model to expand services that are already being provided is not in the best interest of our neighbors and loved ones. Bexar County, TX reports annual county savings of $5 million in diverting individuals from incarceration and an additional $4 million from inappropriate admissions to emergency rooms. The solution in regards to building sustainable crisis services is not always to continue with the path that has been set forward but to ensure we are considering models that are leading other parts of the country in treating individuals experiencing a mental health crisis or challenge in least restrictive, destigmatizing, and decriminalizing manner.

ABOUT NAMI MAINE: Incorporated in 1984, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine Chapter (NAMI Maine) is the state’s largest grassroots mental health organization. With support from national and regional affiliates, the agency is dedicated to building better lives for everyone impacted by behavioral health concerns. NAMI Maine engages with leaders and community partners at all levels to improve the state’s mental health system through collaboration and education.