



Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine

The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers

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Testimony in Support of LD 258

An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025
February 24, 2023

Good afternoon Senators Rotundo and Baldacci, Representatives Sachs and Meyer, and members of both the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services Committees. My name is Malory Shaughnessy and I am the Executive Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services. The Alliance is the statewide association representing the majority of Maine's community based mental health and substance use treatment providers, providing services to over 80,000 Maine men, women, and children. The Alliance advocates for the implementation of sound policies and evidence-based practices that serve to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our behavioral health care system.

On behalf of the Alliance, I am here today to speak strongly in support of today's sections of the budget – the DHHS adult services for those facing mental health and substance use challenges. Especially the critically needed investments in upgrading MaineCare Rates for the provision of these services across our state, and both the Opioid Use Disorder Prevention and Treatment Fund, and the continued investment in the Progressive Treatment Fund to hopefully expand access to the Progressive Treatment Program (PTP) in Maine. PTP is designed to help people with a severe and persistent mental illness stay stable on their medications and other treatment plans, and out of hospitals and jails.

For five or six years, I and other advocates have come to this statehouse continually seeking MaineCare rate increases and rule changes to improve the behavioral health system of care in Maine for some of our most at risk and vulnerable residents. We watched the Pandemic hit us like a tsunami, both flooding the system with increased demand for services and toppling some of the most critically needed services like Assertive Community Treatment and Medication Management for those with serious mental illness.

Then in the 130th Legislature, working with legislators and the administration, we were able to work together to create a new MaineCare Rate Reform process that has begun to address this crisis in our mental health safety net.

The Alliance fully supports the \$213 million in funds to continue these payment improvements, including related Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) state-funded programs. It also includes \$7 million to target toward direct response to the opioid crisis. We applaud the work the administration has put into this budget proposal. It is a huge step forward.

As I said on Tuesday, this investment is needed and truly “historic.” **But it is not transformational.**

It is allowing history to better catch up to the current costs of providing these services in a system that had both cuts and stagnant rates for 10 – 15 years.

These rate increases were implemented in January of this year through the supplemental FY 23 budget. Many of them have not actually started being paid out on claims yet due to errors in the MaineCare and KEPRO system of claims processing that have still not caught up to the changes. Some providers have been serving Mainers since January First with little or no payments for these services. The system is not stabilized yet, and providers are concerned that this continued investment might be cut from this budget.

Please show strong support for these investments as proposed.

Please also remember that there are other bills coming before the legislature this session that will add to this investment in our system of care, and work on many other parts that still need attention.

Please also look closely at these initiatives as they come before you – and support them.

One final word before I close. I would like to point out that in the budget documents before you, we are still seeing stigmatizing language that should have been eliminated by the dictates of several pieces of legislation passed by this body over the past few years. Terms like “substance abuse” are littered throughout this document. It also still references the department or office of “Substance Abuse” which was changed several years ago to the Office of Behavioral Health. When we speak of “abuse” we should stick to subjects like “child abuse” or “sexual abuse” and not stigmatize those struggling with a health issue like substance use disorder or addiction.

Thank you for your time and attention to these issues.