

Testimony of James Bailey

In Support of the Health and Human Services Portion 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" (Emergency)

(Governor's Bill)

Sponsored by Representative Melanie Sachs

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and member of the Committee on Health and Human Services, I'm James Bailey, a licensed social worker employed at Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center and president of the Maine Service Employee Association Local 1989 chapter that represents the hospital. I am submitting this testimony on my own time in support of LD 258 and to highlight the needs of the hospital.

Consider that the average length of a medical hospital stay is about 4.5 days, whereas a typical commitment at our state psychiatric hospitals is measured in months. The consistency of staffing in a psychiatric hospital, with patients that have been hospitalized months and sometimes years, is of vital importance to the functioning of the hospital. In previous supplemental budgets, money has been appropriated to DDPC to fund expenses related to travel nurses. The frequent turnover of staff – especially nurses, but also therapeutic staff, clinical staff, recreational staff, and more – makes our jobs not only more difficult, but more dangerous. A patient that doesn't trust their staff in a state hospital is a patient that has a higher risk of violence due to their mental illness.

You are likely well acquainted with the increase in violence against healthcare workers in emergency departments both across the state and the country. Every employee at both state hospitals, regardless of position, must train to physically restrain violent and unsafe patients against walls for emergency medication administration, to use non-restrictive blanket wraps to safely seclude, and place them in a multi-point restraint chair if they persist in unsafe behavior. Not only is one's training important in these unfortunate events, but trusting that those working with you are equally trained and prepared is essential. Frequent turn-over erodes that trust. Staff being mandated to work past their shift end time due to poor staffing erodes that trust. Nickel-and-diming staff compensation and benefits erodes that trust.

Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center and Riverview Psychiatric Center need consistent staffing across the board to keep the staff safe and the patients safe. Money invested in travel nursing and contracted employees should be invested in the staff committed to the hospitals, the state, and the people they serve. Please ensure that the State seriously address the known 15% average pay gap across state employees with regional peers, please ensure that the State prioritize the safety of their staff and patients, please ensure that the State operates the hospitals with equity, opportunity, and fairness.

Thank you for your time and consideration and feel free to follow-up with any questions you may have.