

Testimony for the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and the Health and Human Services Committee; February 24, 2023



Regarding 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

Good afternoon Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Health and Human Services Committees. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Eric Meyer; I am CEO of Spurwink Services. I am here to speak in support of LD258. At Spurwink, we provide behavioral health and educational services to children, adults, and families across Maine. Last year, we served over 8,100 Maine people affected by trauma, mental health challenges, substance use disorders, developmental disabilities and autism, so they can live healthy, engaged lives **in their communities**. The adult behavioral health funding in LD258 is critical to ensure that that vision is realized.

I am very pleased to report that the proposed funding in LD258 for adult behavioral health will make a significant difference for services that Maine people depend on. Today I'm asking you to support this bill.

Many of you know me and have heard me speak about the desperate need for increased funding for behavioral health services. I am deeply grateful and appreciative that over the last few years in particular the legislature, Governor Mills and our colleagues at DHHS have enabled significant funding that was a good start in remedying a decade of underfunding of these services. This proposed budget will allow providers to stabilize services and in many cases expand access to care. Increasing service availability is critical because the need in Maine has never been greater.

This type of investment in behavioral health services is powerful and can be life changing. A year ago, Spurwink, in close partnership with DHHS, opened the Living Room Crisis Center in Portland, Maine's first crisis receiving center. In that year we served 634 guests over 5267 visits. One quarter of guests had their needs met in a single session. Three quarters had their needs met in five sessions or less. At the other end of the spectrum are guests who visit the Living Room every day.

One day this past year, the Spurwink team had a call from the local Emergency Department. Staff at the ED were worried about a particular person who was usually in the ED constantly, but hadn't been there in weeks. They were worried that the person had died. The Spurwink team was pleased to let them know that all was well, and that the person was receiving services at the Living Room.

In the year before the living room opened, that person was hospitalized 13 times, including one ICU stay. Portland Police responded to 11 overdoses for this individual alone, in the community. In the year since the Living Room opened this individual has had zero hospitalizations, police have responded to zero overdoses, and the person has transitioned from unsheltered homelessness to housed.

The funding in this budget will allow us to expand services and increase urgently needed access to care. There are still gaps we need to address, such as the profound shortage of clinicians, but this is an excellent start. As director Probert of MaineCare stated recently to the HHS Committee, the **rate increases resulting from the new rate analysis for many of the behavioral health services are simply "setting a new baseline," but it is not fixing the whole system.**

Thank you for considering these important issues and please support LD258.