



# **Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine**

## ***The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers***

Malory Otteson Shaughnessy, Executive

Director

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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 21, 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. I am a resident of Westbrook and 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. 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 Children's Services. Especially those pertaining to the Homeless Youth Program, Foster Care and Therapeutic Foster Care, and the critically needed investments in upgrading MaineCare Rates for the provision of behavioral health services to our youth.

Many of you have seen me before you for several years now, sharing our concerns that the system of care for children with behavioral health challenges is fraying and falling apart. We have pointed out the hundreds and hundreds of children awaiting services, the dozens of them sent out of state for their care (far from home and family). We have highlighted the children stuck in our hospital emergency rooms, and in youth corrections because there was nowhere else for them to go.

We have continually sought rate increases and rule changes (without great success most times) to better allow for evidence-based programs that can work with youth at the shallow end of the pool, in home and community treatment. However, in the 130<sup>th</sup> Legislature, working with legislators and the administration, we were all able to create a new MaineCare Rate Reform process that begins to address the stagnation of rates that led to this decrease in access that we have seen for over a decade.

There is proposed a \$237 million investment in federal and state funds to continue MaineCare and related payment improvements as well as make investments in the children's behavioral health system and opioid response. The proposed biennial budget has \$213 million in funds to continue these payment improvements, including related Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) and Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) state-funded programs. It also includes \$17 million to address the urgent need to expand the range of services for children's behavioral health and \$7 million to target toward direct response to the opioid crisis.

We applaud the work the administration put into this budget proposal. It is a huge step forward. The Governor several times stated that this investment is “historic” and it is. **But please understand that it is not transformational.**

It is finally allowing history to better catch up to the current costs of providing these services in a system that had stagnant rates for 10 – 15 years. And as we all know; the pandemic has added to this burden and has intensified the demand and the wait times. These rate increases and new investments are **CRITICAL** to stabilizing our system of care for youth struggling with mental health and substance use challenges, and their families.

If these investments in the increased rates were to be cut from the budget, having been implemented in January of this year through the supplemental FY 23 budget, and allowing providers to start hiring and expanding services – it would collapse the entire system. **Please support these investments as proposed.**

In setting this new baseline from which to build, the department has come a long way to fixing many of the issues that have broken our system of care for our most at-risk children. However, there will be other bills coming before the legislature, and especially the Health and Human Services Committee, this session that will add to this investment in our system of care, and work on many other parts that need attention. **Please also look closely at these initiatives as they come before you.**

Our community-based system of behavioral health care for our children has been at risk for years, it has been hit with cuts and withered with lack of attention -- this investment stops the bleeding and stabilizes the patient, but there is still much work to be done before it is healed.

Thank you for your time and attention to these issues.