

Jenny McCarthy
Raymond
LD 445

Testimony of Jenny McCarthy

Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services to Apply for a Waiver from the Federal Government for the Medicaid Limitation on Payment to a Facility with More Than 16 Inpatient Beds for Psychiatric Treatment LD 445

Members of the Health and Human Services Committee, thank you for taking the time to read my testimony IN OPPOSITION TO LD 445.

My name is Jenny McCarthy, and I live in Raymond, Maine. I am on the PAIMI advisory council (Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness) with Disability Rights Maine as well as a member of IPSAC, which is the Intentional Peer Support Advisory Committee with the State of Maine. IPSAC is a group of Certified Intentional Peer Support Specialists who advise and support the Department of Health and Human Services in the continued development and fidelity of the Intentional Peer Support (IPS) program in Maine.

More importantly though, I am a person with lived experience with Maine's mental health system.

I am surprised that you are considering this bill to begin with given the lack of information available to justify the millions that will be spent. Currently there is no data that reports how many of the psychiatric beds in Maine are actually available. Maine hospitals are not required to report how many empty psychiatric beds they have at any given time. We hear about the patients stuck in emergency rooms for days and weeks at a time and are told "there are no beds". When patients are denied admission, they are told "there are no beds available". This is a misconception.

Maine hospitals can and do deny patients a bed in their facility even when they have empty beds. They are not required to give a reason why. Most often they will say they do not have the staffing to support units to be at capacity. I am aware of the outcries over emergency rooms being full and the "lack of beds" in Maine, but the lack of beds is not because they don't already exist. Patients have been denied an empty bed because they are homeless, and the hospital does not want to have to deal with the discharge dilemma when it comes to housing or a safe place to go. Patients have been denied a bed because they have a physical medical condition that requires a nurse to be available and the hospital says they can't provide that. How can anyone say more institutions need to be built when there is no data telling us what the daily capacity is of the institutions we do have?

On October 20, 2020 Joe Lawlor at the Portland Press Herald reported that Southern Maine Healthcare was opening a new 40 bed psychiatric facility.

"The new psychiatric center – which will cost \$11 million – increases capacity from 12 beds at Southern Maine Health Care in Biddeford to 40 in Sanford."

The public was told at that time it was going to be "like a relief valve" on the problem of psychiatric patients in emergency rooms. Nothing changed with emergency rooms holding psychiatric patients for long periods of time.

PPH went on to report:

"The state has an official capacity of 500 licensed beds for psychiatric use, according to the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, but many of the beds are not in use."

When hospitals report they can't accept patients because they can't staff for full capacity then why would we think building another institution would be any different? I believe it is your responsibility as members of this committee to investigate this further and make decisions based on facts.

I am not sure how many of you were old enough to remember AMHI, the atrocities that occurred there, and why the consent decree really needed to happen. That consent decree was crucial for Maine. But time passes and people forget.

I hope you do not forget. I hope if you are not fully informed that you will learn more before voting on this bill. Building more institutions, increasing the number of psychiatric beds at any facility is failing to remember our past and repeating the same mistakes. If our hospitals can't fully staff the psychiatric beds we already have then there is no reason to believe we can staff more institutions. Without the qualified staffing these institutions become ripe for abuses to

happen to patients that have already suffered enough trauma.

I understand supporters of this bill being upset about the crisis in our emergency rooms. You should be upset about the emergency room crisis. No one is healing in emergency rooms and patients are experiencing and witnessing additional trauma while there. But it is my hope that you will learn the facts and be upset about the real issues.

Maine is lacking community based psychiatric care. Maine is entirely lacking peer run crisis centers that are an alternative to emergency rooms. Maine needs to help those in crisis to be in their community, not sent away, not locked up and certainly not stuck in an emergency room. We know that people heal when they have genuine support. We know that people that choose their own path of treatment have much more success than those that are forced and coerced. We know that suicides are higher in the immediate period AFTER being discharged from a hospital. And we know patients that are held against their will feel more traumatized after discharge due to being stripped of their dignity and sense of personal safety ripped away after being separated from family and friends.

I am asking you to listen to us. Bring us into the conversation. This bill impacts me and my peers in the community. I know many people are afraid to ask for help because they fear being involuntarily hospitalized when sometimes what they need most is to be heard.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony and consideration before you vote on this bill. I am asking you to oppose this bill and vote OUGHT NOT TO PASS.

Sincerely,
Jenny McCarthy