



January 23, 2024

Senator Joseph Baldacci and Representative Michele Meyer, Co-Chairs
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
State of Maine Department of Health and Human Services
109 Capitol Street
Augusta ME 04333

RE: LD 2105, Resolve, to Protect and Enhance Access to Behavioral Health Services
in Androscoggin County and Surrounding Communities

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Dr. Sally Cooper and I currently serve as Chief of Behavioral Medicine at St. Mary's Health System which includes responsibility for clinical and operational oversight of all behavioral services connected with St. Mary's including CCS Outpatient Psychiatry. Before coming to St. Mary's, I served as Medical Director for Spring Harbor Hospital. I am board certified in General Psychiatry as well as Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and have been a member of the American Academy and Maine Council of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry since 1996. From this perspective, I ask for your support of St. Mary's Health System in Lewiston at a time that is critical for this community as well as the State of Maine.

As you know, St Mary's is the only local provider of acute behavioral healthcare services in the Lewiston-Auburn area, and one of the largest providers of these services in Maine. I have had the pleasure of working at St Mary's since May 2023 and moved to St Mary's, as I was impressed with their commitment to the mission to serve the community, and their legacy of providing high-quality behavior health services in a compassionate environment.

The mass shooting in October underscored the need for continued development of comprehensive delivery mechanisms to properly meet the behavioral health care needs of the citizens of Maine, and Lewiston-Auburn in particular. The behavioral health emergency department at St Mary's is often over capacity. Our inpatient adult mental health, adolescent mental health, and chemical dependency units are full.

A critical missing piece in this community is the level of service between outpatient services and inpatient services. A primary barrier to discharge is the absence of community resources at a lower level of care that can meet the needs of the chronically acute patients that we serve. This level of care will be achieved through the development of a day hospital (partial hospital or intensive outpatient) program. Our proposal would create this level of service to support adults and adolescents with mental health and substance abuse services who need more than community-based services and less than inpatient acute care. Our current pro forma estimates that this would reach approximately 500 patients annually and would fill the current gap in the behavioral health continuum of care in our community. We expect that this program could be accessed by residents in Androscoggin, Oxford, and Sagadahoc Counties. Additionally, this program would help reduce the need for higher cost emergent inpatient admissions and ultimately reduce the financial burden on the state for such admissions.



**Support Letter from Sally Cooper, MD / In Support of LD 2105,
Resolve, to Protect and Enhance Access to Behavioral Health Services in
Androscoggin County and Surrounding Communities / January 24, 2024**

The need for behavioral health services in our community has never been more apparent. Every day, our inpatient staff experience difficulty setting up appropriate services so that patients may be discharged in a safe and timely manner. The delay in discharges that is inevitable in these circumstances creates a back log of patients in our behavior health emergency department. Often, there are more than 10 patients in the behavioral health emergency department waiting for inpatient treatment. Often patients move from the most acute level of care in the hospital to minimal outpatient services, without opportunity for a gradual transition to a lower level of supportive care as is most appropriate in these circumstances.

St Mary's is at a financial tipping point. We stand ready to expand our services to provide that missing level of care, a far better option for the community than needing to reduce capacity due to persistent operating losses. We are therefore asking for urgent legislative relief to restructure services to better meet the needs of the residents of Lewiston-Auburn and surrounding communities.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Sally Ann Cooper, MD
Chief of Behavioral Medicine