

Testimony of Cindy Segar-Miller

In Support of LD 2105, Resolve, to Protect and Enhance Access to Behavioral Health Services in Androscoggin County and Surrounding Communities

January 24, 2024

Good morning Representative Meyer, Senator Baldacci, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. I am Cindy Segar-Miller, President of St. Mary's Health System in Lewiston, and I am here today in strong support of LD 2105. I am deeply grateful to Senator Rotundo for sponsoring this bill and to the many other sponsors for their support. I thank all of you for your time and attention today.

As you have heard, this bill provides the opportunity to extend a safety net to the most vulnerable in Lewiston-Auburn and surrounding communities, while ensuring that critical services currently in place are strengthened. The mass shooting in October has underscored the need for continued development of comprehensive delivery mechanisms to properly meet the behavioral health care needs of the citizens of Maine.

St. Mary's is the only local provider of acute behavioral health care services in Lewiston-Auburn and one of the largest providers of these services in Maine. We offer acute behavioral health care through inpatient and emergency department settings, and our community partners, including our affiliated community health center, offer an array of community-based behavioral health services including outpatient therapy. A critical but missing piece to provide a complete continuum of needed services to the community is the level of service between what is available in the community setting and what the hospital currently does. We would like to be able to fill this gap through the development of a day hospital program.

Our proposal includes creating a day hospital program providing adults and adolescents with mental health and substance abuse services. 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. We expect that this program could be easily accessed by residents in Androscoggin, Oxford and Sagadahoc counties.

However, we cannot develop this service without your help. In fact, continuation of our current program offerings is also at risk. Quite frankly, St. Mary's is at a tipping point. In recent years St. Mary's Health System has experienced severe operating losses, and one key component of those losses has been the negative operating margin in its behavioral health programs. Losses have been especially large in 2022, and we estimate that in 2023 total losses in behavioral health care services will be in excess of \$10 million.

We have met with the Department of Health and Human Services to express the urgent need for financial support in order to avoid reductions and move ahead with plans to improve the continuum of behavioral health care. We are grateful for the recent improvement in behavioral health hospital rates but have explained that these changes are not enough given the circumstances we face. We have been assured that the Department is carefully considering our needs and may have proposals to offer in the near future. As I prepared this testimony, however, we had not yet heard what those proposals might look like.



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We are asking you to act decisively to aid St. Mary's in our mission to provide the essential services that the people in our community count on. Access to mental health care and other services crucially important to the most vulnerable populations in our communities are at risk. St. Mary's has been a longstanding pillar of care in Maine's network of behavioral health services as well as an essential access point for the people in our communities who face the greatest barriers to obtaining the health care that they need. Should St. Mary's be forced to significantly reduce its mental health care capacity or to curtail other needed healthcare the impact will be felt throughout a State that is already experiencing behavioral health access and capacity challenges.

During this hearing, you will hear from our medical staff leadership who will offer first-hand testimony supporting the need for the development of a true continuum of care that is more easily accessible for those who need behavioral health care. On the front lines, there is complete agreement: the responsible path is to offer more, not less to those who need us most.

I ask for your full support of LD 2105 and the regionally essential behavioral health services that we offer and intend to expand. We will be glad to answer any questions of the Committee today or in time for the work session, and we are eager to continue working with the Department of Health and Human Services on creative solutions in the meantime. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Cindy Segar-Miller, FACHE, RN
President