



## **Testimony of Douglas G. Smith, 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**

Good morning Representative Meyer, Senator Baldacci, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. I am Dr. Doug Smith, Chief Medical Officer and Vice President of Medical Affairs at St. Mary's Health System in Lewiston. I am a board-certified Family Physician with over 25 years of experience and have served in system leadership positions for over 20 years.

For two decades, I have chosen to dedicate my clinical practice to the State of Maine and to Androscoggin County by providing primary care for patients of all ages. I can unequivocally state that over time, the demand for behavioral health care has escalated. Post-pandemic, multiple sources cite that well over half of primary care visits are mental health related. The need for mental health care is not confined to hospitals and doctors' offices. The impact of this growing crisis is felt throughout our community. For nine years, I served as school physician for both the Lewiston and Auburn school systems. Here I helped establish and lead school-based centers in all 4 Lewiston/Auburn middle/high schools. These centers include behavioral health services. It is not surprising that since the tragedy in Lewiston last October, the need for support by children and adolescents has skyrocketed and the acuity of those who need care is very, very high.

In my position as Chief Medical Officer at St. Mary's my responsibilities include oversight of behavior health services. As a practicing provider and as a health system leader, I have seen the growing need for mental health services both in the outpatient and inpatient settings as well as for patients whose needs fall in between. Our behavioral health emergency department is often over capacity. Our inpatient adult mental health, adolescent mental health, and chemical dependency units are full. I have seen first-hand the impact this has had on individuals and families when people are not able to access the level of mental health services they need in a reasonable, timely manner. It can be devastating.

St. Mary's is a regional resource for mental health services especially for hospital-based psychiatric and chemical dependency services as well as a resource for regional law enforcement. We need to continue these services. We also often provide a wider safety net, frequently for prolonged period of time in our Emergency Department, for those community members who need care that falls between what is available through inpatient hospital and community-based services. Today, we have outlined a solution – the development of a day hospital program that will strengthen the continuum of care for residents in Androscoggin, Oxford, and Sagadahoc Counties.

I add my voice in support of LD 2105 and ask that you provide urgent legislative relief to enable us to continue existing services and establish the day hospital solution to better meet the needs of the residents of Lewiston-Auburn and surrounding communities. I am happy to answer any questions you may have today or in time for the work session. Thank you for your consideration and for your attention.

Sincerely,

Douglas G. Smith, MD  
Chief Medical Officer