



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

~Sponsored by Sen. Peggy Rotundo

MELEGISL#56/5357#

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Kenneth Albert, and I am a resident of Lewiston. Professionally, I am licensed in Maine as both a Registered Nurse and an Attorney. I serve as the President and Chief Executive Officer of Androscoggin Home Healthcare & Hospice, Maine's largest home-based healthcare provider. We navigate health care at home and in the community, including behavioral health services, for roughly 4000 patients per day across Maine. I have also had the privilege of serving Maine within the last decade as its State Health Official and Director for the Maine Center of Disease Control and Prevention.

I offer my written testimony in support of LD 2105, and I wish to thank Senator Rotundo for sponsoring this important bill.

Mental health is Maine's top health priority as identified in our last Shared Community Health Needs Assessment Report in 2019.¹ All sixteen counties identified mental health and substance use/misuse as top priorities. In Androscoggin County, access to services was next ranked as a priority, yet access to behavioral health services has declined precipitously. The reason is clear: We have failed to invest the necessary resources to sustain meaningful access to behavioral health services.

As a small provider of community based behavioral health services, I am acutely aware of the wait lists that exist for necessary care. As the only local provider of acute inpatient behavioral health services, St. Mary's is a frequent partner with whom we manage patients across the behavioral health continuum. That said, the gaps in service availability that both of our organizations encounter relate exclusively to lack of effective funding to support program costs. The mass shooting in October underscores the need – the gaps – and the lack of investment in our mental health care infrastructure. State government must act! We have been waiting too many years for the private sector to respond to the need – to no avail. Private equity investment is not coming. Philanthropy is not coming. The free-market economy cannot and will not fill the gap.

I invite you to spend a day in your local emergency department. You will undoubtedly encounter behavioral health patients of all ages awaiting placement in one of Maine's few inpatient behavioral health units, or outpatient day treatment programs, which level of care is completely

¹ <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/phdata/MaineCHNA/documents/2019-State-Report.pdf>

missing in Androscoggin County and surrounding communities. Hundreds more precariously await services from the discomfort of their homes.

If funded, LD 2105 will create the capacity for St. Mary's to offer a much needed day hospital program in central Maine (Androscoggin, Oxford and Sagadahoc Counties). It is no secret that hospital profit margins have narrowed significantly, and disappeared altogether for many Maine hospitals. Margins that once supported these services in our region are no longer. If we value behavioral health services as a society, we will need to invest tax dollars to make them available --- pure and simple.

I urge your vote in favor of LD 2105.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Albert". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kenneth J. Albert, R.N., Esq.
President & CEO
Androscoggin Home Healthcare + Hospice
(207) 795-9442
ken.albert@androscoggin.org