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Good Afternoon Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Health and Human Services and Appropriations Committees.

My name is Dannielle Hartford and I am an outreach coordinator and LADC at AngleZ Behavioral Health. I am not a resident of Augusta but spend much of my time for work and for my personal life in this city. This has given me an opportunity to observe the mental health needs of some of the most vulnerable and disconnected individuals in our community. I am writing to you today in regard to portions of LD 209.

Last session, Governor Mills' supplemental budget secured funding for establishing a crisis receiving center in Lewiston, as well as funding for the establishment of a crisis receiving centers in Kennebec, Aroostook and Penobscot counties. This possibility offered an exciting opportunity to improve accessibility of clinically trained support staff for individuals who are experiencing a mental health crisis and unable to remain safe in the community without support. This also would have been an opportunity to improve the process of coordinating care for individuals needing ongoing support after stabilizing in these crisis centers. This would happen through provider connections that increase successful warm handoffs from the crisis center to community resources that can take over support of the individual in the least restrictive ways. Additionally, the individual already has familiarity with the crisis center which will increase the chances of us using this facility in future crisis. This would not only speed up access to safe resources for a member but open up our ED's to function more in the medical capacity it's intended for.

Despite the good that this would bring to our community and members living with persistent mental illness, the current proposed budget aims to exclude Kennebec and Aroostook counties from getting funding for this great need. I ask that this be reconsidered and do so with particular focus on the area of Kennebec County that currently doesn't have the capacity to meet the level of crisis intervention services given the housing, opioid and mental health emergencies that we are faced with in this state. Without the introduction to this critical service, there is a high probability that individuals will continue to be at risk of serious harm or death to themselves or others in the community. Our vulnerable populations already feel unheard and experience ongoing hopelessness that their intense needs will not be met in appropriate ways. Investing in these services allows for specialized, trauma informed care to be offered to individuals who are otherwise at risk of further decline if they have no safe place to go and address their overwhelm with structured skills support. Investing will also contribute to decreases in risk of more housing stressors, justice involvement as well as any further decline in the community environment.

We urge legislators to ensure that the funding of the crisis receiving centers in Kennebec and Aroostook Counties remain in the budget. If there has to be cuts, we ask that you at least keep Kennebec County in. Kennebec County is a service center and needs these services.

Every dollar we invest in services in the short-term will reduce costs in the long run. The more we support Maine Families and communities in overcoming today's challenges, the more return on investment we will see in the future.

I thank you for your time and for your consideration,

Danielle Hartford BA, LADC, MHRTC

Augusta Maine Patron and employee

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