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Testimony in support of LD 721

Resolve, to Support the Full Implementation of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics
in the State
April 9, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Christy Daggett. I am the Interim Chief Executive Officer of the Aroostook Mental Health Center. Thank you for the opportunity to write today in strong support of L.D. 258, *a Resolve to Support the Full Implementation of Certified Community Health Clinics in the State*. AMHC serves over 4,000 adults and children in Aroostook, Hancock and Washington Counties. I am writing today to testify from my experience: the CCBHC model already has made a difference in the lives of the people we serve and holds the promise of so much more to come.

Maine has not been exempted from the mental health crisis that swept the globe during the COVID-19 emergency, and the counties served by AMHC have been some of the hardest hit in the state. Suicide rates statewide have increased by 65% since 2000¹; [more Hancock County residents report thoughts of suicide than any other county](#). Unsurprisingly, Hancock also reports the highest rate of [severe depression](#). Rates of child and teen suicide in Aroostook, Washington and Hancock are [one and a half times](#) the state average. This mental health crisis is layered atop the opioid crisis that was already blazing pre-pandemic – while fatal overdoses appear to be responding to federal- and state-level interventions, our work is not done, and the harm is intergenerational – our counties have some of the highest rates of young children in DHHS custody.

This co-occurrence of mental health and substance use crises has wrought real harm to our families, communities, and economy. People struggling with mental illness or substance use disorders are disproportionately [homeless](#), [jailed](#), or [sidelined from the workforce](#). But just as dawn seems to be breaking after years in the grip of the opioid crisis, the CCBHC model has offered community-based mental health centers like AMHC some new tools. The agency received a federal grant that allowed us to make our first move toward making our outpatient services more sustainable – we turn no one away for lack of insurance and offer a sliding fee scale to all. We used the funding to pay direct staff expense, to offer recruitment incentives, to

¹ See “Suicide in Maine,” Maine Department of Health and Human Services

train people as peer support specialists, improve our data and reporting capabilities, and to offer agencywide trainings in such subjects as motivational interviewing. When Maine elected to become a CCBHC demonstration state, AMHC was prepared and ready to go! We have continued to improve our reporting, recruiting a CCBHC coordinator, as well as a Veterans' Specialist – Maine has one of the highest populations of veterans in the US, and many live in our service area. The federal award under the CCBHC model allowed us to open a small Call Center and offer some nontraditional office hours to receive callers unable to call during the workday. It's no secret that the mental health infrastructure in Maine is strained – AMHC struggles to fill therapist vacancies. Despite this, we have increased the volume of our outpatient services by 6 percent since March 2024. We have furnished a modest “crisis drop-in” center in our Caribou office. Our Call Center staff can take 70 – 90 complex calls per day, with most callers seeking crisis services.

AMHC has been a part of our community longer than I have been alive. But now, the adoption of the CCBHC model has permitted the agency to extend its reach and connection to the people we serve in a tangible, quantifiable way. The agency is grateful to the Department for the partnership offered during this early phase, and we support the emergency passage of LD 721 to continue to build on the initial federal and state investment.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Christy Daggett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christy Daggett, MPP
Interim Chief Executive Officer