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Testimony of Gary Dugal, President/Executive Director, Good Will-Hinckley, in support of **LD 1745: *An Act to Stabilize Residential Treatment Capacity for Children and Youth in Maine***

Submitted to the Committee on Health and Human Services

Date: 4/28/2025

Distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of LD 1745: *An Act to Stabilize Residential Treatment Capacity for Children and Youth in Maine*, on behalf of Good Will – Hinckley and all residential providers in what I still believe, despite our broken system of care, is the great state of Maine.

Maine's residential treatment system for children and youth is in critical condition. Today, while there are 181 licensed beds available in the state, only 126 children are currently placed in residential care. An additional 76 children are actively waiting for an available residential bed. This gap in capacity forces many families into crisis, with children enduring prolonged stays in hospital emergency departments, hotels, or being sent far from their homes and communities.

Alarming, 66 Maine children are currently placed out of state to receive the care they need — a clear indication that Maine's system cannot meet the current demand. Each out-of-state placement disrupts critical family connections, education, and the child's long-term recovery, all while imposing greater financial and emotional costs on the state and families.

These numbers paint a stark and urgent picture. Behind every statistic is a child — a child struggling with trauma, behavioral challenges, or mental health conditions that, without timely intervention, could worsen and require even more intensive care later on.

LD 1745 takes meaningful steps toward reversing this trend. Specifically, this bill:

- **Creates greater accountability and transparency** by requiring timely legislative notification when a children's residential care facility closes.
- **Establishes a stakeholder-driven needs assessment** to identify the critical short-term and long-term staffing and resource needs to sustain and expand residential services.



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- **Analyzes the significant financial costs** associated with long stays in emergency departments, hotels, and out-of-state placements, providing essential data to inform future policy and funding decisions.
- **Improves aftercare service models**, making support for families more accessible and flexible by recognizing workforce realities and lived experience, while maintaining important quality standards.
- **Provides emergency funding** to stabilize facilities at risk of closure — a necessary lifeline as providers face rising workforce shortages, underfunded service models, and increasing complexity of care needs.

As providers on the frontlines of children's behavioral health, we see firsthand the devastating impact that limited access to residential treatment has on children, families, and communities. Good Will – Hinckley's Roundel Residential program was one of the casualties realized in this critical time, as we were forced to suspend that program in the beginning of April. We can also see the opportunity: with strategic investment, collaborative planning, and sustained attention, Maine can rebuild a system that ensures children can get the help they need, close to home.

LD 1745 represents a critical, common-sense investment in Maine's children, families, and future. We urge the Committee to vote ***Ought to Pass*** on LD 1745 without delay.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your commitment to Maine's most vulnerable children.

Respectfully submitted

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