

Written Testimony for LD 1703

April 27, 2025

Dear Representative Gramlich and Senator Moore, Representatives Brennan, Crafts, Graham, McCabe, Mitchell, Shagoury, Stover and Zager & the members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is **Roy Ulrickson III, LCSW**. I live in Newport and am a father of 2 neurodiverse children, I am testifying on behalf of the Autism Society of Maine (ASM) Board of Directors as the Treasurer. I am testifying in favor of **LD 1703: Resolve, to Establish the Adverse Childhood Experiences Screening and Resiliency Assessment Pilot Project**.

I have been working in the education and mental health fields for over 15 years. I have worked with children in the public elementary school setting from pre-K to grade 5 and as a clinician therapist providing HCT (Home and Community Therapy) with children in the home setting. What I was unprepared for when starting these roles was the amount of trauma, specifically childhood trauma, that I would encounter. This included not only the children but the families that I supported. I was also dismayed regarding how little medical health professions, mental health professionals and teachers understood about childhood trauma and how to provide trauma informed care. This lack of understanding unfortunately continues years later.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Study revealed that trauma that children experience has injurious, long-term effects on mental and physical health. ACEs are strongly correlated to obesity, depression, suicide, substance abuse, imprisonment, teen pregnancy, liver and heart disease, and COPD. Nearly 40% of children will experience 3 or more ACEs in their lifetime. The original ACEs study was published nearly 20 years ago, yet there is still no systematic approach to address the effects trauma has on our children or the resulting detrimental economic impacts. The CDC considers ACEs the most critical public health crisis that affects the mental, physical, and emotional health of both children and adults. It has been determined that ACEs are **“the nation’s worst health crisis, and its least known.”**

My more recent positions have been providing virtual therapy for individuals in substance abuse recovery and working with the homeless and individuals with severe mental illness. Anecdotally, in my experience working individuals in these populations, childhood trauma was nearly universal. Research suggests that approximately 75% of people with SUD (substance abuse disorder) have a history of trauma. Additionally, a significant percentage of homeless individuals have experienced trauma, with studies showing that between 80% and 90% of homeless people have experienced at least one traumatic event in their lifetime. Furthermore, 91% of homeless people in one study reported experiencing at least one traumatic event, and 99% experienced childhood trauma.

Learning about childhood trauma and helping individuals who have experienced ACEs has been my mission since I graduated from my MSW program in 2015. What I have found is that utilizing trauma focused, evidenced interventions can be successful tools to help individuals heal from their past. I have also learned is that early intervention is EXTREMELY important!

I am strongly in favor of passing LD 1703 and addressing the issue of childhood trauma in the State of Maine. Intervention is most effective when provided during the early years of a child's life, as the brain is most adaptable during this period. Effective interventions can prevent long term medical conditions, mental health treatments, occurrences of substance abuse and incidents of homelessness. Conservative estimates demonstrate a \$12 return on every \$1 spent on early intervention. Addressing the devastating effects of childhood trauma is not only a moral obligation, but it also has significant economic benefit as well. The time to act is now!

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Roy Ulrickson III, LCSW
Father of Roy "Andrew" Ulrickson IV and Thomas Ulrickson
Autism Society of Maine Treasurer