



**Maine Medical
Association**



Testimony on behalf of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

**In SUPPORT of LD 1631, Resolve, to Implement the Recommendations of the Stakeholder Group
to Address Child Stay Times in Hospital Emergency Departments**

**Health and Human Services Committee
April 28, 2025**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Madeleine DesFosses, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (Maine AAP). We are in support of LD 1631, which seeks to address the issue of children and adolescents experiencing long stays in hospital emergency departments.

The Maine AAP is a professional organization of 300 pediatricians and pediatric subspecialists dedicated to protecting the health of Maine children and adolescents. The Maine Medical Association (MMA) is a professional organization representing more than 4,000 physicians, residents, and medical students in Maine. MMA's mission is to support Maine physicians, advance the quality of medicine in Maine, and promote the health of all Maine people. The Maine Osteopathic Association (MOA) is a professional organization representing more than 1,200 osteopathic physicians, residents, and medical students in Maine whose mission is to serve the Osteopathic profession of the State of Maine through a coordinated effort of professional education, advocacy, and member services in order to ensure the availability of quality osteopathic health care to the people of this State.

It's clear that youth in Maine and across the country are in the midst of a mental health crisis, and are being left without the appropriate services and treatment they need. Every year, about half a million children receive care in emergency departments for acute psychiatric emergencies (1), which are defined as "acute life-threatening disturbances of behavior, thought, or mood, which, if untreated, may lead to harm to self, others, or the environment" (2). While emergency departments play an important role in screening and assessing youth who may be experiencing a mental or behavioral health crisis, they are not suitable alternatives to inpatient mental and behavioral health services.

Every day, youth across our state wait in emergency departments for days or even weeks, not because they need emergency-level care, but because the appropriate community-based services, residential treatment placements are simply unavailable. Maine's emergency departments are not designed to serve as long-term solutions for children in crisis, often causing further detriment to the health of the youth and exacerbating the crisis (3). This issue won't resolve itself – we need policies that ensure access to appropriate care for youth experiencing mental health crises.

The stakeholder group that convened under previous legislation brought together families, health care providers, child advocates, and policy experts. Their recommendations focus on expanding community-based services, improving coordination of care, and increasing capacity for timely placement. LD 1631 takes these recommendations seriously and sets us on a path toward meaningful, systemic change for Maine's youth.

We cannot continue to allow emergency rooms to serve as holding places for children in need. LD 1631 offers a thoughtful, informed, and actionable blueprint for doing better for the short- and long-term.

We urge the committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1631, *Resolve, to Implement the Recommendations of the Stakeholder Group to Address Child Stay Times in Hospital Emergency Departments.*

Thank you for your time and attention to this crucial issue.

Madeleine DesFosses
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References:

1. Joel D. Hudgins, Lois K. Lee; The Waiting Game: Boarding for Pediatric Mental Health Emergencies. *Pediatrics* March 2025; 155 (3): e2024069841. 10.1542/peds.2024-069841
2. Stein DJ, Phillips KA, Bolton D, Fulford KW, Sadler JZ, Kendler KS. What is a mental/psychiatric disorder? From DSM-IV to DSM-V. *Psychol Med.* 2010;40(11):1759–1765

3. Jennifer Schieferle Uhlenbrock, Kathleen Brown, Muhammad Waseem, Sally Snow, Madeline Andrew, Alice A. Kuo, Carmen Sulton, Thomas Chun, Lois K. Lee, AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS Committee on Pediatric Emergency Medicine, AMERICAN COLLEGE OF EMERGENCY PHYSICIANS Pediatric Emergency Medicine Committee, EMERGENCY NURSES ASSOCIATION Pediatric Committee; The Management of Children and Youth With Pediatric Mental and Behavioral Health Emergencies. *Pediatrics* September 2023; 152 (3): e2023063256. 10.1542/peds.2023-063256