

POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT

LD 1745 An Act to Stabilize Residential Treatment Capacity for Children and Youth in Maine

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine supports the passage of LD 1745, *An Act to Stabilize Residential Treatment Capacity for Children and Youth in Maine*. NAMI Maine supports the delivery of timely, evidence-based treatment at an appropriate level of care within a young person's community and surrounded by their support whenever possible. We do recognize that there are times when children need a higher level of care and often hear the stories of parents fighting to access the resources that their children need.

Maine has just entered into a settlement agreement with the Department of Justice regarding the over-institutionalization of our young people, particularly those with complex behavioral health needs. The Department of Justice identified that many young people are left to languish within emergency departments while awaiting out-of-home or residential placement, resulting in some being placed within the criminal justice system. At any given time over the last year, there have been roughly 200 children placed in an in-state residential program, with over 50 in out-of-state placements. A 2021 memo from DHHS reports that there are 459 licensed residential treatment beds in the State of Maine and DHHS's Children's Behavioral Health's most recent data shows that only 173 of these in-state beds are utilized.

This is not a question of available beds, but rather an appropriate and functional use of established, but dwindling, resources. Many of these beds remain unused due to the staffing crisis. With insurance reimbursement rates what they are, facilities are not able to offer a competitive wage to employees. Staff find that they may earn comparable wages by leaving their positions to take a job at a local fast-food restaurant for instance, which does not involve the emotionally taxing and physically exhausting work that can be required at a children's residential facility. We see this staffing struggle in community-based services, as well, contributing to the expanding gap in outpatient, community-based services. Additionally, NAMI Maine has heard multiple stories of individuals being discharged from residential programs, not because they have stabilized their symptoms, but because the programs are closing. Their families report limited community resources available to support the young people with acute needs in their communities, resulting in re-hospitalizations sometimes with languishing in emergency rooms.

As the state works to move forward to support young people on their journeys to wellness, it is imperative that the system examine the structure and resources in place, as well as those being lost due to multiple challenges facing the system. Without planning and transparent communication, our young people and their families are left with limited options and supports.

ABOUT NAMI MAINE: *Incorporated in 1984, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine Chapter (NAMI Maine) is the state's largest grassroots mental health organization. With support from national and regional affiliates, the agency is dedicated to building better lives for everyone impacted by behavioral health concerns. NAMI Maine engages with leaders and community partners at all levels to improve the state's mental health system through collaboration and education.*

LEGISLATIVE CONTACT

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POSITIONS & POLICY AGENDA
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