

Testimony of Melissa Hackett

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In support of LD 2125, An Act to Sustain Access to Children's Residential Care Services
January 27, 2026

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the committee. My name is Melissa Hackett, and I am a Policy Associate with the Maine Children's Alliance (MCA). I also serve as the Coordinator for the Maine Child Welfare Action Network. I am testifying today in support of this **legislation**.

This legislation is a critical opportunity to shore up Maine's child residential treatment system. The current funding model does not reflect the true costs of running these programs, leading to staffing challenges and safety concerns for staff and youth with higher acuity needs. This strain has led to significant closures and capacity in-state to provide this level of care to Maine children and youth.

The result has been a reliance on out-of-state placements and children remaining for long periods of time in emergency departments. These placements do not provide the best or most appropriate care for young people who need a high-level treatment placement; instead, it disconnects them from family and community, which are essential to their overall well-being.

We are aware that the Department has included the relevant rate section in plans for reviews. We appreciate this step in acknowledging the crisis this part of the children's behavioral health continuum is in and taking steps to address them. We urge them to prioritize this for review this year. In addition to the critical rate determination process to ensure programs are adequately funded, this legislation would establish a small emergency stabilization fund to preserve existing in-state capacity and prevent further closures.

After years of stress due to higher acuity mental health needs of young people and inadequate reimbursement rates to adequately staff and maintain children's residential programs, we are at a critical moment to shore up the ability of providers in Maine to continue these critical services. Children and youth in our state deserve to get the care they need, when they need it, where they need it. This legislation provides an important opportunity to ensure this part of the continuum of care is available for youth who need it, within their own communities.

I hope you will support this legislation. Thank you.

Commented [LD1]: I think there's too much background in the first couple paragraphs; but it doesn't explain the bill or inoculate you against your concerns, as the child safety info appears late in the piece "Importantly, the most serious offenses..." I think it needs to explain that this is a precision reform, and that permanent registries reduce safety by destabilizing families.