POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT

LD 497: An Act To Strengthen Supports for Families and Children through a Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention and Early Intervention Program

Presented to Maine’s Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

As the state’s largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine supports the passage of An Act to Strengthen Supports for Families and Children through a Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention and Early Intervention. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, the impacts on the state’s children have been significant. Maine leads the nation in the percentage of children diagnosed with an anxiety disorder and is third in the nation for children diagnosed with depressive disorders. Research has clearly indicated that anxiety and depressive disorders are correlated strongly with the experience of abuse and neglect during childhood. It is estimated that 80% of all life-time mental health and substance use presentations are rooted in the experience of trauma. The more proactive and preventative approaches that are utilized in addressing and protecting children and their families, the more positive outcomes for all involved.

While the state moves to take a proactive and preventative approach for support children and their families during these difficult times, it is important to be mindful of the system and services this measure is looking to build. Although all interventions during these difficult times are imperative, it is also important that when utilizing the state’s resources, services are utilized that are evidence based. This act demonstrates intentions to ensure that that children and families will access to resources, however it is unclear the resources and structures that will be put into place. The services are being structured to help the most vulnerable, who are currently isolated and at the greatest risk, however it does not outline how these children and families will be reached and connected to resources. The emergent need of this act is clear, due to the pandemic a great deal of children are currently cut off from many of their greatest supports, however there is no clear plan on how to continue to identify these children. Lastly, it outlines services and supports to be utilized, which is imperative in supporting children and families. Yet many of the services and supports that currently exist in communities to support at risk communities continue to experience extremely long waitlists and continue to be delivered via telehealth, which continues to promote these children being disconnect from their regular supports.

The intentions regarding this act are incredibly important in supporting children and families currently. The research clearly indicates that early intervention and prevention increases resiliency and decreases the risk of lasting impacts. However, the structure and system that may be employed in order to achieve this will need to be thoughtfully considered, as many evidence-based services in the communities across the state continue to be underfunded, understaffed, and continue to provide telehealth services to the children and families across the state, which this bill aims to end in order to ensure in person services provide children safe connections 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

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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.