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Testimony of Rep. Lori K. Gramlich in support of

LD 258, An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025

Before the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services

Good afternoon, Senators Rotundo and Baldacci, Representatives Sachs and Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services.

My name is Lori Gramlich, and I represent House District 131, the community of Old Orchard Beach. While I am here today in support of LD 258, I am urging the committees to consider some minor amendments as you embark upon your work for this bill.

I am heartened and optimistic to see appropriations made for policy initiatives regarding mental health care in our state included in the Chief Executive's proposed budget. As you may recall, the 130th Legislature examined a number of bills relative to prevention-based supports, particularly for children in need of mental health care. We know that prevention-based approaches not only save money in the long term, they are also a tool to help ensure that children remain in their homes, getting the care they need before larger problems arise.

Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to tour the emergency department at Southern Maine Health Care. Part of this tour included the behavioral health psychiatric wing of the hospital. There are four rooms dedicated to both adults and children in this wing. These four rooms are approximately 12 feet by 12 feet with only a bed bolted to the floor and a plastic chair. No windows, no TV - nothing except a bed and a chair. These rooms are intended for short-term emergent psychiatric and mental health care. They are not intended for long-term stays, and they are certainly not intended for children - children as young as five and eight years old. However, these beds are indeed being used for children as young as five years old, right alongside adults, and they are being used for longer-term placements, if these children make it out of the emergency department. Many of these children languish for days and sometimes weeks in the emergency departments across the state waiting for care.

Unfortunately, this scenario is not unique to southern Maine. In fact, the more rural parts of our state, due to a number of variables, are painfully familiar with these situations, exasperated by the sheer lack of providers and geography.

Ensuring that providers are reimbursed rates to not only provide adequate care but also to hire staff is but one solution I hope the committees will remain mindful of as you consider this legislation. Additionally, adequate funding for home-based community treatment and targeted case management will give us the necessary tools to prevent the painful situations described above, which many families and children find themselves in. And finally, I implore us as a Legislature to have the collective will to ensure that children in need of residential treatment services are able to access said services in a least restrictive environment right here in the state of Maine.

Another policy initiative that I will direct your attention to concerns children's oral health care. This body passed during the last legislative session an expansion of the state's School Oral Health Program, a priority that was unanimously supported by both of these committees last session. By way of reference, this was a piece of legislation that came before the HHS Committee and was ultimately embedded into last year's supplemental budget.

The language enacted into statute required the Maine CDC's School Oral Health Program to expand to all schools by 2025. The fiscal note at the time, last session, projected a staged ramp-up of funding over three years with a gradual increase each year, reaching the full amount of funding needed to serve all schools in FY 2025.

Funding and staffing for this critically important prevention-based programming was an essential first step. However, I am disappointed to see that the further increases for FY 2024 and 2025, as outlined in the original fiscal note, do not appear in LD 258.

Currently, the baseline allocation of resources identified in the FY 2022/2023 supplemental budget enables the School Oral Health Program to reach approximately 200 schools. However, we still have children throughout Maine who do not have access to these prevention-based oral health care services. As I know you all are aware, providing resources aimed at preventing dental disease most certainly saves the state money in the long run by decreasing the need for oral health interventions for adults due to the fact that, as children, they did not receive the oral health care they needed.

I am asking these committees to amend LD 258 to ensure we have the necessary funding to continue with expansion of the School Oral Health Program.

Others will come before you to elaborate on the importance of this issue, what the necessary funding requests are and why securing these funds to have this expansion realized is an essential component to the program's success and for the success of our children. I can share additional information about how this program impacts your districts and am happy to provide that for your work sessions.

I am happy to try to answer any questions for you. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to working with you on these two important issues impacting the children of our state.