

**LD258: 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- 2025**

**Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs**

NAMI Maine strongly endorses robust financial support for the critical legislation improving mental health treatment and supports presented before this committee in the 131 Legislative Session. Since 1983, NAMI Maine has provided mental health education, advocacy and support for the 1 in 4 Maine citizens living with a mental health challenge and the families and professionals that improve their lives. Our staff and volunteers statewide work closely with Maine's educators, healthcare providers, mental health agencies and a range of social service providers to improve their capacity and competence in providing care and support. I speak today to underscore the need for increased targeted funding to address a burgeoning need. The stresses of the pandemic lowered mental health stigma allowing people to seek help and today it requires a herculean effort to access care as practices are full and wait lists startlingly long.

In these challenging times and with an emergent response system that is overwhelmed by increased needs and hampered by a lack of staffing capacity to adequately operate the step-down options after an acute stay, the system is struggling and Maine citizens and families are suffering. Maine needs to continue to build the capacity for services lost over the past 10 years and to work to fulfill the promise of the AMHI Consent Decree to build and staff a community safety net that works to keep severely mentally ill Mainers out of our criminal justice system and safely in the community.

Let me share a few metrics underscoring some mental health conditions in Maine. For high school adolescents, as measured by the Maine Integrated Health Survey in October 2021, 36% of students surveyed indicated significant signs of depression over the past year, **48% of girls**. 18.5% of students reported seriously considering suicide and 9.0% reported making a suicide attempt in the past 12 months. Again, for girls the rates were significantly higher (24% considering and 11% attempting). The metrics for our LGBTQ+ students look even more distressing. This calls for a more thoughtful approach addressing gender responsive care and the needs of our LGBTQ+ youth! Overall, 3 in 10 youth with a major depressive illness did not receive the care needed even before the pandemic.

For Maine's adults 22% report living with a mental illness, 9% with a substance use disorder and, in the pandemic, anxiety and depression symptoms in adults almost tripled with the largest increase among adults 18-24. The surge coincided with significant restriction in access to care. Almost 50% of adults with a mental illness in 2019 did not receive treatment. That proportion is higher today. The exacerbation of trauma, mental health and substance use disorders has led to record levels of deaths of despair, suicide, overdose deaths and alcohol-related losses. We cannot quickly make the world a more hope-filled place, but we can fund a range of treatment and community supports. In a year with exacerbated mental health challenges, we need to fully support Maine's system of care

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*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.*

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