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Testimony of Rep. Allison Hepler presenting
**LD 539, An Act to Provide Substance Use Disorder Counseling for MaineCare Members
with an Acquired Brain Injury**
before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Good morning, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Allison Hepler, and I represent the towns of Arrowsic, Georgetown, Phippsburg, West Bath, and Woolwich. I am pleased to present **LD 539, An Act to Provide Substance Use Disorder Counseling for MaineCare Members with an Acquired Brain Injury**.

I don't need to tell this committee about the challenge of substance use disorder. I am not an expert, but I do know the pain that this causes patients, families and the community. Its causes are many and its effects vary from person to person. I am presenting this bill on behalf of a relatively small but growing population, namely, people with acquired brain injury who are recipients of MaineCare.

This bill would make available substance use disorder counseling in addition to other services offered in Maine's "102 clinics," which comprise the eight outpatient neuro-rehabilitation clinics covered by MaineCare.

As you may know, the Acquired Brain Injury Advisory Council was established in 2007 to address the needs of people with brain injury, to provide independent oversight and advice and to make recommendations regarding unmet needs and service gaps to the DHHS commissioner. The Council's recent needs assessment identified substance use disorder as one of those gaps. This bill is a result of that assessment.

Others will be speaking with more expertise as to the specific ways that brain injury and substance abuse interact. In some cases, people with brain injuries who struggle with everyday life can turn to drugs or alcohol to alleviate stress or physical pain. In other situations, substance use can cause brain injury, as in the case of non-fatal drug overdoses.

We are lucky, and we are a leader. Maine is the only state with these outpatient neuro-rehabilitation clinics for individuals with acquired brain injury who are covered by Medicaid. In

addition, people do not need a waiver to access the services at these clinics; they only need to be MaineCare recipients.

Adding substance use disorder counseling to the array of services already provided in these clinics is a valuable way for patients to access help if they need it, and in an integrative setting rather than the stand-alone clinics that treat substance use disorder counseling.

Thanks for your time, and happy to answer questions as I can.