

POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT

LD 1236: An Act to Increase the Provision of Children's Behavioral Health Services in Rural Areas and to Provide Support for Families of Children Receiving Services

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 unanimous passage of LD 1236 to increase access and support for children's behavioral health services in Maine's rural communities.

Maine is the most rural state when measured by the high proportion of our citizens living outside an urban area. The delivery of services of almost any form faces the challenges of increased distances, fewer service centers, a reduced provider base and extremely limited public transportation. This may be especially true in behavioral health services and deeply impacts access to care for youth in a time of escalated needs. The prevalence of mental health concerns does not differ markedly between urban and rural regions, but those living in rural locations receive mental health treatment less frequently and often with providers with less specialized training, when compared to those residing in metropolitan locations. The primary reasons for this disparate treatment include less access to care, fewer providers, especially psychiatry and in specialized treatment modalities and limited care coordination between regional hospitals and local treatment providers. Adding to the challenge is an increased stigma associated with engagement with the child welfare system and a culture of stoicism inhibiting help-seeking. Rural citizens die by suicide at twice the rate than those in urban settings.

LD1236 provides for recognition of the rural barriers resulting in a disparity of care and seeks to provide remedies to some of the systemic ones. Increased Mainecare rates for rural service delivery will support increased provider base by allowing an improved wage for providers. It will also fund travel for the greater distances to connect families with services and to support family and provider team meetings for better coordination of services. It may provide a greater level of service delivery to support increased family reunification and professional services during a time of great stress and need for children and their families. We urge passage of this bill at a time of documented increased need and scarcity of providers.

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.*

LEGISLATIVE CONTACT

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POSITIONS & POLICY AGENDA
www.namimaine.org/advocacy