

131st Legislature
Senate of
Maine
Senate District 2

Senator Harold 'Trey' Stewart
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**LD 2009, "An Act to Prevent Abandonment of Children
and Adults with Disabilities in Hospitals"**

January 16, 2024

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

I am Trey Stewart; and I represent Senate District 2, which includes several communities in Aroostook and Penobscot Counties. I appreciate your time today in allowing me to present LD 2009, "An Act to Prevent Abandonment of Children and Adults with Disabilities in Hospitals."

No doubt you are all fully aware of the crisis we are in as a State with the lack of behavioral health specialists. One of the tragic end results of this inequity is that parents, when at their wit's end when children are spinning out of control, are bringing their children to hospital emergency rooms for care; and when the emergency department has done all they can and the patient is ready for discharge, the parent leaves the child because there is no other place for them to go – for their own safety and that of others.

Hospitals have become inundated with patients – children – who are lingering, or shall I say languishing, in emergency departments for weeks. My proposal would require the hospital to notify child protective services or adult protective services who then will take custody of the patient. I understand this is what some would consider radical, but we **MUST** do something to address this issue. I do have a separate bill that will be heard later in session that addresses our lack of behavioral health specialists; however, the thought of a young child sitting in a room in the emergency department – no fresh air, no windows, no toys, limited family and friends – is so distressing to me. Children in these situations fall deeper and deeper in despair. Any past clinical progress made is quickly erased.

I implore you to find a solution for these children.

Thank you for your time and attention.