

LD 2214: An Act To Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and To Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025

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

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine strongly supports the consideration and funding of critical resources for the youth in our state in the supplemental budget presented before this committee. NAMI Maine works closely with peers, families, community resources, and law enforcement across the state in supporting the 1 in 4 Mainers living with mental health challenges. Maine has one of the highest percentages of children diagnosed with depression and anxiety in the nation. In June of 2022, the United States Department of Justice found that the State of Maine was violating the rights of children with disabilities, primarily mental health, with an overreliance on state institutions, such as the criminal justice system and psychiatric hospitals.

As fiscal considerations are made by the committee, it is critical to examine both the present financial concerns, as well as possible future implications. Currently, the lack of community-based mental health services for children, particularly in rural settings, puts the state at significant risk for ongoing findings that we, as a state, are failing our young people, and there are consequences on many levels moving forward, particularly for youth not receiving the necessary services or level of care. According to the Department of Justice investigation, community behavioral health services in the state are lacking support with daily living activities, behavior management services, as well individual and family therapies. The Department of Justice also noted a deficit in crisis services available to respond to communities to divert young people from higher levels of care.¹

It is also critical to consider that much of the work and legislation seeking funding before you reflects crisis-level needs. Without proactive and community-based approaches, the state continues to seek to fund more costly and restrictive services. In many of these services, the role of the support is to stabilize the acute presentations that have initiated crisis contact. The work to stabilize young people at these high levels of care does not provide or support the necessary and ongoing treatment required in order to transition and safely maintain young people within their communities. Maine needs to ensure that children released from intensive acute treatment transition into community supports that maintain their stability and ensure success at home and in the community.

NAMI Maine worries about the ongoing mental health of our young people, as well as the long-term implications to the state for the shortcomings of the underfunded community mental health system. We ask that the committee consider the need for community behavioral health services, particularly in our rural areas, and although many of the costly acute services are needed, please do not overlook the evidence-based services lacking in many parts of our state.

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.

¹ [United States' Investigation of Maine's Behavioral Health System for Children under Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act \(justice.gov\)](https://www.justice.gov/behavioral-health-system-for-children)

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POSITIONS & POLICY AGENDA
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