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Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Dr. Laura Blaisdell-- I am a resident of South Portland, a board-certified, public-health trained pediatrician and the current president of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MeAAP).

I am speaking on behalf of the MeAAP in Support Of: LD 2237 An Act to Strengthen Public Safety, Health and Well-being by Expanding Services and Coordinating Violence Prevention Resources.

LD 2237 shores up critical gaps in mental health crisis response services and begins to address, proactively, the epidemic of violence facing Mainers. I will organize my comments by the LD's corresponding parts.

Part A of LD 2237 addresses the breakdown of mental health crisis support in Maine. In 2021, a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health was declared jointly by the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Children's Hospital Association. Maine's pediatricians and mental health providers fight this crisis everyday in our offices and in our emergency rooms. We emphatically support funding to strengthen and expand mental health crisis intervention and look forward to providing input into how these systems can appropriately serve children and adolescents including those with developmental disabilities. The expansion of crisis receiving centers as outlined in Part B and like the one currently in Portland are proving helpful in addressing the mental health crisis. In just two years, the center has served more than 1,200 people-- keeping Mainers out of emergency rooms, focusing on peer support and treatment. We are grateful that Maine adolescents aged 14 and up can receive services at the Portland crisis center and ask the state to continue to consider the mental health crises of all children, beyond emergency department lodging, in planning for services.

MeAAP supports the spirit of Part D of this bill yet wants to stress the critical needs in speech and occupational therapists for children in Maine. Payment reform for services delivered under Section 28 for those with developmental disabilities and section 65 for behavioral health issues in the home.

MeAAP strongly supports the preventative approaches of LD 2237's Part C and D. The establishment of an Office of Violence Prevention within the Maine CDC is critical to plan, coordinate and implement effective efforts to reduce growing violence of all types, including from guns. Complex public health crises such as gun violence require years-long, multi-layered approaches that can be implemented, evaluated and improved upon *over time*. The establishment and continuous funding of a violence prevention program is an essential first step to addressing violence in Maine. Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for Mainers aged 10-34 and the 3rd leading cause of death for those aged 35-44. Like gun violence itself, decreasing suicide requires a thoughtful, multi-pronged approach and the inclusion of a gun shop project in Maine is one example of how our entire health and safety community can play a role in addressing suicide deaths in Maine.

MeAAP strongly supports LD2237 and respectfully requests you to vote 'Ought to Pass'.

Dr. Laura Blaisdell MD/MPH, FAAP

President, MeAAP

¹<https://www.mainepublic.org/health/2024-02-19/crisis-receiving-center-in-portland-helps-to-fill-gaps-in-maines-mental-health-care-system>

²<https://cams-care.com/state-statistics/maine/>

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