

MaineHealth

Testimony of Sarah Calder, MaineHealth
In Support of LD 2223, “Resolve, to Direct the Department of Health and Human Services to Amend Rules and Establish a Study Group Related to Funding and Reimbursement for Mental Health Crisis Resolution Services”
Tuesday, March 5, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Sarah Calder, Senior Government Affairs Director at MaineHealth, and I am here to testify in support of LD 2223, “Resolve, to Direct the Department of Health and Human Services to Amend Rules and Establish a Study Group Related to Funding and Reimbursement for Mental Health Crisis Resolution Services.”

MaineHealth is an integrated non-profit health care system that provides the full continuum of health care services to the residents of eleven counties in Maine and one in New Hampshire. As part of our vision of “Working Together So Maine’s Communities are the Healthiest in America,” MaineHealth, which includes Maine Behavioral Healthcare (MBH), is committed to creating a seamless system of behavioral healthcare across Maine, coordinating hospital psychiatric care with community-based treatment services, and providing better access to behavioral healthcare through integration with primary care.

Crisis services are a critical component of the continuum of behavioral health services, and we thank Senator Stewart for bringing this important legislation forward. Our behavioral health crisis system is in disarray, and for children and individuals with autism and IDD (both children and adults), the system is non-existent. Unfortunately, without an adequate crisis response system, families are forced to use hospital Emergency Departments, which can stabilize a short-term acute crisis, but which fail to provide the ongoing treatment that patients need to recover.

We would, however, urge the Committee to amend the legislation before you today to add an area where we see the greatest need – crisis residential services, or crisis stabilization beds. Both providers in hospital Emergency Departments and residential care providers will tell you that we are in desperate need of additional crisis stabilization beds to care for individuals experiencing a mental health emergency. These beds provide immediate, short-term treatment in a less restrictive setting than a hospital and offer a more appropriate alternative to the Emergency Department.

With that addition, we urge you to support LD 2223, and we look forward to working with the Committee this Session to rebuild and grow the behavioral health system to meet the increasing needs of Maine’s population. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.