



**Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine**  
*The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers*

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**Testimony Regarding**  
**The Governor's Biennial Budget – LD 210**

February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Good morning, Senator Rotundo, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Gattine, and Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of both the Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services. My name is Jennifer Christian, and I live in Dresden, ME. I am the Associate Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine (the Alliance). The Alliance is the statewide association representing Maine's community-based behavioral health agencies who provide much-needed services to over 80,000 children, adults, and families annually. The Alliance advocates for the implementation of sound policies and evidence-based practices that serve to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our behavioral health care system.

The Alliance recognizes the importance of maintaining a balanced approach during the biennial budget process. We appreciate the recent progress made in community behavioral health, particularly in rate reform, and are encouraged by the proposed investments of \$1.5 million for new mobile crisis rates, and \$3.6 million for new crisis receiving centers in Lewiston and Penobscot County. These initiatives are critical, as Maine's crisis system requires enhanced, on-going support. We have all witnessed the success and potential of the crisis receiving center in Portland, which underscores the need for continued investment.

That said, we are deeply concerned about several proposed cuts and funding levels in this budget. Despite recent improvements, Maine's behavioral health workforce continues to struggle to meet the demand for mental health and substance use services. Access to care remains a challenge, as evidenced by long waitlists for community-based services and individuals languishing in emergency departments instead of receiving the behavioral health support they need.

**Maine cannot afford to reverse course or retreat from prior and existing commitments to strengthening our behavioral health system.**

Specifically, we respectfully urge the committees to reconsider the following proposed cuts, reject the proposal to suspend MaineCare cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs), and restore funding to critical behavioral health initiatives:

- The elimination of COLAs in FY26 & 27, which are protected by state statute and essential for provider agencies to sustain and grow a robust workforce.
- The suspension of crisis receiving centers in Aroostook and Kennebec Counties.
- The reduction in medication management workforce incentives.

Lastly, we respectfully urge the committees to consider including additional cost-effective investments and approaches to maintain services and address urgent gaps in behavioral health care as part of this budget. Notably, certified community behavioral health clinics (CCBHCs) offer a transformative and bipartisan approach to community behavioral health.

These clinics receive flexible funding to provide expanded access to comprehensive, high-quality mental health and substance use services. CCBHCs have demonstrated cost savings across the country by improving access to care and reducing emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and law enforcement encounters.<sup>i</sup> Here in Maine, starting in 2020, grant-funded CCBHCs have successfully expanded access to children, veterans, individuals struggling with addiction, and those in rural areas. By appropriating just \$2 million in additional state funding, Maine can leverage a 73% enhanced federal match, ensuring that all five existing grant-funded CCBHCs can remain operational, expand their services to reach more populations and regions in greatest need, and participate in the state's new Medicaid demonstration.

Maine's behavioral health system has made meaningful progress in recent years as indicated through rate reform, the introduction and early success of CCBHCs, and a 19% reduction in fatal overdoses in 2024.<sup>ii</sup> We must continue building on this momentum rather than moving backward.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony this afternoon. I would be happy to answer any questions from the Committees.

Respectfully,

Jennifer Christian  
Associate Director

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<sup>i</sup> National Council for Mental Wellbeing. 2024 CCBHC Impact Report. June 2024.

<sup>ii</sup> Bangor Daily News. Maine saw a 19 percent drop in overdose deaths last year. February 2025.