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Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine

The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers

Testimony Regarding The Governor's Biennial Budget – LD 210

February 24th, 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 Adam Bloom-Paicopolos. I am a resident of Wells and am proud to serve as the Executive 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.

On behalf of the Alliance, I am here today to speak in reference to the children's behavioral health portions of the Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget, LD 210.

The Alliance understands the need at taking a balanced approach to this biennial budget process and appreciates the proposed investments in children's behavioral health. We also appreciate the hard work and collaboration that the Office of Behavioral Health has displayed in working with the provider, family, and consumer advocate communities in bringing forward solutions to this complex issue. Funding for treatment foster care, the new psychiatric residential treatment facility (PRTF), and the new children's behavioral health single assessment are important first steps towards beginning to address the longstanding challenges our child behavioral health system is experiencing.

As many of you are aware, the Department entered into a settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice to make significant improvements in our community behavioral health system for children and youth. This agreement represents a tremendous opportunity to make meaningful changes in our system to do better by our children— and I urge you all to leverage this opportunity to transform our state's approach to be more comprehensive and preventative.

There is no single silver bullet to fix our entire system—no one program or service that will bring the over 70 Maine children placed out of state or languishing in emergency departments (which is heartbreaking) home tomorrow. But we can start by looking at investments across the continuum of care both in the initiatives in this proposal and in the initiatives that will come before the legislature this session.

Enhancing access to community-based treatment, such as improving **treatment foster care rates** or **expanding children's ACT teams** (of which Maine currently has just one in southern Maine) are vital initiatives to support. We must also do better

at expanding and maintaining our upstream community-based options before needs go unaddressed and acuity, in turn, rises. Initiatives such as **rebuilding our school-based services availability** or ensuring adequate funding is available for the **full implementation of all five certified community behavioral health clinics (CCBHCs)** in Maine through LD 721 help meet these earlier needs in a more cost-effective manner for the state. For those youth where a facility-level of care is appropriate, it is critical that we take steps to stabilize our residential treatment providers – a service that continues to see closures pile up – so that a single less than 20 bed lock-down PRTF or the emergency department are not the only options available.

Lastly, a core component of ensuring any of these services can get off the ground and make an impact on our state’s children – it is crucial that the state maintain its commitments to invest in the behavioral health workforce. The settlement agreement explicitly requires cost-of-living-adjustments (COLAs) alongside consistent rate reform efforts for community-based services such as ACT and HCT to “address any current or future workforce shortages of community-service providers”. Without an adequate workforce, and without a comprehensive approach to our continuum of care, Maine children will continue to be unable to access appropriate services in their homes and communities, encounter our law enforcement system, and remain stuck in out-of-state placements and emergency departments.

I respectfully ask that the committees not only accept the children’s system initiatives in the proposal before you but expand upon these investments to build a more robust continuum of care that accelerates the work towards achieving the goals of the settlement agreement.

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

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adam Bloom-Paicopolos', with a stylized, flowing script.

Adam Bloom-Paicopolos, MPP
Executive Director