February 24, 2025

Good morning, Senators Rotundo and Ingwersen, Representatives Gattine and Meyer, and members of both the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Rebeca Patkus, and I am a resident of Augusta. I am a licensed clinical social worker and Vice President of Outpatient and Community Services at Spurwink Services. I am here today to speak to you regarding the Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget, LD 210.



I started my career at Spurwink 20 years ago as a clinician in our school-based counseling program. This program started in the early 1990's, as an innovative model of placing clinicians from a behavioral health agency in public school settings to provide therapy services to youth. We started with three clinicians in one school district and today Spurwink has partnerships with close to 100 schools who would like to have a clinician serving their students. Only 50% of those schools currently have clinicians placed in them. The benefits of this model, serving students in a familiar setting and working in close collaboration with school staff, are fully appreciated. In recent years, youth mental health needs have increased dramatically. Rates of reimbursement through Mainecare, which covers approximately 75% of the children served in this program, have not kept pace.

Behavioral health agencies including Spurwink have been unable to recruit and sustain these important services. The 50 unfilled positions represent more than 1,000 young Mainers whose mental health and wellness needs are not being met. While there have been critical investments in the behavioral health service array made in recent years, continued investments are needed. I focus on the school-based service model today as I believe it is a key service in supporting Maine youth well-being. In my years as a clinician and supervisor, I have seen and heard innumerable stories of how this service has made an important difference- in supporting youth in returning to school after periods of truancy, in helping youth stabilize following crisis without the need for higher levels of care, and in providing support and skill-building for parents and caregivers who are parenting through hardship.

I'd like to thank the Governor, her administration and this body for the investments and achievements in rebuilding behavioral health services in Maine in recent years. I am also grateful for the continued investment in the proposed biennial budget despite the budget challenges. Stabilization of Mainecare funding, inclusion of Mainecare COLA's, rate methodology reform, and continued creative solutions for behavioral health workforce are all critical to ensuring we can continue to rise to meet the needs of our communities—in particular youth and families.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you for your time and consideration.