

To: Members of the Maine State Legislature - Health and Human Services Committee

From: Rachel Solotaroff, MD; Medical Director Milestone Recovery, New Horizons

Date: March 10, 2025

Good Afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Rachel Solotaroff, a resident of Portland Maine and I am writing to provide testimony in strong support of increased funding for Level 3.7 Withdrawal Management (Detox) facilities in Maine. As the Medical Director of Milestone Recovery (Portland) and New Horizons (Hampden), both licensed and certified withdrawal management centers, I have witnessed the urgent and ongoing need to stabilize the operations of these critical facilities. Our work is essential for ensuring patient safety, reducing unnecessary hospitalizations, and fostering long-term recovery for individuals facing substance use disorders. However, our ability to continue providing these vital services is being hindered by resource constraints, particularly around the staffing challenges we face, especially in maintaining sufficient nursing support.

Medical Necessity of Level 3.7 Withdrawal Management Services

Level 3.7 Withdrawal Management is a high-intensity level of care designed for individuals who require both medical supervision and structured support to safely detoxify from substances such as alcohol, opioids, benzodiazepines, and other drugs. Unlike outpatient treatment, which may not provide sufficient oversight, or inpatient hospitalization, which may be an overuse of resources for less acute needs, Level 3.7 services strike the necessary balance to ensure safety while addressing the withdrawal symptoms that can be life-threatening.

For individuals experiencing substance withdrawal, the risk of serious medical complications, including seizures, cardiovascular instability, delirium, and death, is elevated. The withdrawal process can often be unpredictable and require frequent adjustments in treatment. These conditions necessitate a medical environment that includes 24/7 nursing supervision, the presence of medical providers, and access to pharmacological interventions to manage symptoms and reduce the risk of complications.

However, stabilizing the operations of these facilities, especially in terms of maintaining essential nursing support, has become increasingly difficult. Nursing professionals are the backbone of any withdrawal management service. They ensure patients are monitored around the clock, adjust treatment plans as symptoms evolve, and intervene in the event of complications. Despite the clear need, we continually struggle with the recruitment and retention of nursing staff, a challenge that is only compounded by the rising demand for services and the high turnover rates in the healthcare workforce.

A Call for Stabilization in Workforce

The ongoing shortage of nursing staff puts our ability to provide timely and high-quality care at risk. While we strive to meet the needs of every patient who comes through our doors, the reality is that our current staffing levels are often stretched thin. This issue is compounded by the fact that many of our nursing staff are overburdened, leading to burnout and further turnover, creating a cycle of instability that only exacerbates the challenges we face.

The consequences of this shortage are not only detrimental to individuals struggling with addiction, but also to our community at large. Without access to medically supervised detox services, many individuals with severe substance use disorders would be left to navigate withdrawal in less optimal settings, including in emergency departments or jails, which are not equipped to manage these complex medical needs. In the absence of treatment, individuals may relapse, or experience increased physical and psychological harm, further contributing to the cycle of addiction and increasing the overall burden on our healthcare system.

The funding we seek is not simply about increasing access to services, it is about stabilizing the operations of existing Level 3.7 facilities so that we can continue providing safe, effective care. This stabilization includes the critical need for funding to support the recruitment and retention of nursing staff, offer competitive wages, reduce burnout, and improve job satisfaction for our dedicated healthcare workers. By stabilizing these operations, we can ensure that our facility remains equipped to meet the demand for withdrawal management services while maintaining the high standards of care that are required to save lives.

As medical professionals who are on the front lines of this crisis, we are committed to providing the best possible care to individuals in need. However, we cannot do it alone. We need the Maine State Legislature to recognize the importance of these facilities and provide the necessary funding to ensure that they remain a viable and effective resource for individuals facing substance use disorders in our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rachel Solotaroff, MD, MCR, FACP
Medical Director, Milestone Recovery
Medical Director, New Horizons