



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE

Working together to promote quality lives

Testimony in Support of LD 977

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyers and good members of the HHS committee, my name is Betsy Sweet, and I am here on behalf of the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative in strong support of this bill asking the Maine Health Data Organization (MHDO) to develop a plan for annual measurement of the home and community-based services (HCBS) care gap.

I think it is agreed upon by all of us- you as lawmakers, the DHHS, providers, advocates, and consumers, that there is frustration around getting data that will help ensure that we are addressing the most pressing issues in the most effective ways. We all want to make sure we are addressing the most crucial issues – and as resources become tighter and programs are eliminated, this data is going to be more important than ever. I believe that the data is there, but it is hard, if not impossible for any of us to get access to it in a way that is helpful – and that includes the DHHS. This bill would provide a big step toward that goal.

This data could help us make sure that individuals receiving HCBS for both physical and mental health under MaineCare provisions and state-funded programs are receiving the care they are eligible to receive. By leveraging existing claims and care authorization data, we would get a much clearer and more accurate picture of the discrepancies between services that people need and are qualified for and the actual services provided. This will allow policymakers, providers, and advocates to identify gaps and work toward the most effective ways to provide and enhance service delivery.

Key Reasons for Support:

1. **Data-Driven Policy Decisions:** The plan outlined in this bill will ensure that Maine is using reliable, comprehensive data to assess service gaps. This will allow for informed decision-making and the allocation of resources where they are needed most.
2. **Compliance with Federal Standards:** Aligning Maine's HCBS data collection with federal requirements ensures comparability with other states. This will improve our ability to benchmark and adopt best practices from across the country.
3. **Improved Access to Care:** Identifying and addressing gaps in HCBS will help ensure that individuals who rely on these critical services receive the care they need.
4. **Enhanced Accountability:** By measuring and tracking the care gap annually, the state can hold service providers accountable while identifying areas where system improvements are necessary to reduce barriers to care.
5. **Fiscal Responsibility:** Understanding where authorized services are not being delivered can help identify inefficiencies, geographical discrepancies and ensure that state and federal funds are being used most effectively to meet the needs of Maine's most vulnerable populations.

As I have testified many times before, Maine has been a leader in advocating for high-quality home and community-based services for behavioral health, and this bill represents a crucial opportunity to strengthen that commitment. I urge the committee to pass this legislation to ensure that all Mainers who are eligible for these vital services receive the care they need and deserve. Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.