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Testimony in Support of LD 1426 - Resolve to Expand Child Assertive Community Treatment

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Senator Henry Ingwersen, Chair Representative Michele Meyer and other members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services Cross Office Building, Room 209 Augusta, Maine 04333

My name is Marc I Kaplan DO, and I am here today to speak in strong support of LD 1426, the resolve to expand child Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) services in Maine. I am a child, adolescent and adult psychiatrist who has spent the last 25 years working with children who struggle with severe mental health issues and their families. Approximately one year ago as medical director for Sweetser, we opened the first Child ACT team in Maine, since the last one closed 15 years ago. The children we have served on ACT, over the past year have come from grossly extended admissions to hospital emergency rooms, psychiatric hospitals, residential and correctional facilities. Our ACT team has been successful in keeping the majority of them at home and in school. We strongly support LD 1426 as given our success in delivering ACT services in York and Cumberland County, the ACT model should be expanded to serve vulnerable youth in other areas of Maine.

Overview of LD 1426

LD 1426 proposes that the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) expand child Assertive Community Treatment services, a model that has proven to be highly effective in providing comprehensive, community-based care for children facing significant mental health challenges. By expanding this service, we have the opportunity to provide children and families the support they need to thrive without the need for institutionalization or out-of-state placements.

Why I Support LD 1426

1. Supporting Vulnerable Children and Families

The expansion of ACT services will directly benefit the most vulnerable children in our communities—those who are struggling with severe emotional and behavioral issues that are difficult to manage through traditional means. By offering intensive, wraparound services, ACT helps prevent these children from entering the more restrictive, often traumatic, environments of institutional care.

2. Proven Effectiveness of ACT

Assertive Community Treatment is a model with a strong track record of success. Research shows that ACT services significantly reduce hospitalization rates, improve stability in the community, and help families navigate the complex mental health system. Expanding these services will ensure that children receive the care they need in the least restrictive setting, allowing them to stay in their communities and schools.

3. Cost-Effective Care

Investing in child ACT services is a cost-effective way to address the mental health needs of our children. By preventing more costly interventions like emergency room visits and out-of-state placements, we can reduce the overall financial burden on Maine's healthcare and social services systems. It is a smart investment in the future of our children, which will pay dividends in terms of both better outcomes and reduced long-term costs.

The Benefits of Expanding ACT Services

Expanding child ACT services under LD 1426 will allow more families to access high-quality, individualized care. This model of care provides children with the support they need to lead fulfilling lives, stay in school, and maintain positive relationships with their families. It's an investment that aligns with the values we all share—keeping children safe, healthy, and connected to their communities.

Conclusion

For all of these reasons, I strongly support LD 1426 and urge the committee to pass this important bill. Expanding Assertive Community Treatment services for children will make a meaningful difference in the lives of Maine's most vulnerable youth and help build stronger, more resilient communities across our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to consider my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions or provide further information if needed.

Sincerely,
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