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Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine *The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers*

Testimony in Support of

Resolve, to Implement the Recommendations of the Stakeholder Group to Address Child Stay Times in Hospital Emergency Departments – LD 1631

April 28, 2025

Good morning, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Committee on 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 mental health and substance use 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 support of LD 1631, "Resolve, to Implement the Recommendations of the Stakeholder Group to Address Child Stay Times in Hospital Emergency Departments."

This legislation represents a critical and timely effort to address one of the most urgent challenges facing our behavioral health system: the languishing of children in hospital emergency departments due to a lack of available and appropriate community-based services and in-state residential treatment placements. I was a proud member of the stakeholder workgroup facilitated by the Department this past summer in response to LD 2009 from the previous legislative session. The workgroup and all stakeholders involved engaged in careful, thoughtful discussions on this challenging topic. I want to take this opportunity to thank all the individuals, parents, providers, organizations, and Department staff who showed up to this group every week and shared their experiences. The recommendations included here are reflective of this group's commitment to doing better by our children and offer a comprehensive and actionable framework for improving our system of care.

Among the key strategies advanced in this legislation are investments to stabilize and expand residential service capacity, targeted enhancements to the children's crisis system, and strategic alignment of federal funding opportunities through Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT). These measures, taken together, would strengthen Maine's continuum of care for children and families and help ensure that children receive timely and appropriate services in the least restrictive setting possible.

Importantly, LD 1631 also emphasizes transparency and accountability by requiring regular reporting on program capacity, waitlists, and service delivery. Such oversight is vital to ensuring that investments are effective, needs are continuously assessed, and that system capacity is responsive to evolving demand.

Community behavioral health providers are deeply committed to improving our children's behavioral health system and the goals outlined in this legislation. We are grateful for the opportunity to engage with the Department as close partners in the initial steps of their U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Settlement Agreement implementation plan. Achieving meaningful progress will require continued collaboration, strategic investment, and sustained attention to the workforce and reimbursement challenges that constrain access to care and brought this workgroup and the DOJ's lawsuit to Maine in the first place. We look forward to working with the Department, the Legislature, and other partners to ensure that every child in Maine can access the right care, at the right time, in the right setting.

I respectfully urge the Committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1631 as a necessary step toward building a more responsive, coordinated, and compassionate behavioral health system for Maine's children and families.

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

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adam Bloom-Paicopolos', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Adam Bloom-Paicopolos, MPP
Executive Director