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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 **An Act to Stabilize Residential Treatment Capacity for Children and Youth** **In Maine – LD 1745** 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 1745, "An Act to Stabilize Residential Treatment Capacity for Children and Youth in Maine."

Maine's behavioral health system, particularly services for children and youth with complex needs, is facing an unsustainable strain. Our providers and the families they serve are experiencing firsthand the growing gap between the needs of Maine's children and the capacity of our system to meet them. Residential treatment programs, a vital part of a full continuum of care that also includes robust community-based services, are either closing or operating under severe duress due to funding constraints, an unprecedented workforce shortage, and rising levels of acuity. The consequences of this instability are profound, and as this Committee is aware, the state entered into a settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice to address many of these gaps in our system that have left countless Maine children in out-of-state facilities and emergency departments.

Inadequate access to upstream community-based services and treatments combined with the recent wave of residential program closures has left a population of youth with increased level of care needs and families navigating a fragmented system with limited options. Children in urgent need of treatment are often held for extended periods in emergency departments, not because of medical necessity, but because no appropriate residential placements are available — all while receiving no treatment for the behavioral health conditions that necessitated a facility level of care need in the first place. On top of that, too many children are being sent to facilities out-of-state hundreds of miles away from their natural supports, family, and community that are essential to their recovery and well-being.

Today, we have nearly 70 children residing in out-of-state facilities. Not only is this bringing additional trauma to these children and their families, but it is costing the state unknown amounts of funding when we have the physical bed space — but not

the resources needed – to provide appropriate care for these children here in Maine. Setting aside the hundreds of residential beds that we have lost over the past several years, Maine currently has just 181 licensed beds left throughout the state and cannot afford to lose more. Consider that with only 126 of those 181 beds currently filled, we have an open physical capacity of 55 beds, but not the resources to appropriately staff and fill them. While we no longer have enough capacity to provide care for the over 140 children either currently out-of-state or awaiting placement, it is certainly enough to bring more of Maine's children home and provide care for those still waiting if we provide our agencies with the adequate resources to do so.

That is exactly what LD 1745 will do. It directs the Department to formally partner with providers to examine the sustainability of Maine's current residential treatment system and identify the resources needed to expand access to care, especially in more highly acute cases that agencies cannot currently take on. It creates an emergency fund to stabilize our current capacity and prevent additional closures from further restricting access to care. LD 1745 also takes steps to strengthen the aftercare services program to ensure that children and families have access to a service that plays a critical role in facilitating successful transitions back to their homes and communities.

This legislation does not offer a one-size-fits-all solution— rather, it shores up a vital component of a full continuum of care and recognizes that sustainable change must be grounded in partnership between the state and providers. We've seen how this partnership can work – whether it be through continued engagement as part of the DOJ implementation process or through this past summer's LD 2009 workgroup that has already resulted in some actionable steps such as the re-examining of the temporary high intensity services (upstaffing) rate following feedback from stakeholders.

I respectfully urge the Committee to make this important investment in the future of Maine's children and vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1745.

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