

Testimony for the Health and Human Services Committee

April 28, 2025

LD 1745 - An Act To Stabilize Residential Treatment Capacity for Children and Youth in Maine



**SPUR
WINK**

going the distance

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Thank you, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished Members of the Health and Human Services Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to speak in support LD 1745 - An Act To Stabilize Residential Treatment Capacity for Children and Youth in Maine.

My name is Eric Meyer, a resident of Whitefield, a licensed clinical social worker and President & CEO of Spurwink Services. I am here to urge you to support LD 1745. At Spurwink, over 1,000 employees provide behavioral health and educational services to children, adults, and families across Maine. Last year, we served over 10,000 Maine people affected by trauma, mental health challenges, substance use disorder, developmental disabilities, and autism, so they can live healthy, engaged lives *in their communities*.

Child residential services for children and youth are closing. The fallout from these closures is that more children are placed out of state, more children are stuck in Emergency Departments and hospitals, more children become involved with law enforcement and homelessness. I know you've heard concerns about this from our friends at the hospitals and in law enforcement. At Spurwink ten years ago we had just under 200 beds for children in residential programs. Today we have only 16 beds left. I know the same type of program closures are impacting all of our colleagues across Maine.

LD1745 is needed to help address the collapse of our child residential system. Ten years ago, there were almost 400 Maine children in residential care. According to DHHS, as of this past January, 128 children and youth are in residential services inside Maine 64 are placed out of state and 76 children are waiting for services. Many of the children that are waiting are in hospitals or engaged with law enforcement. 64 kids out of state is absolutely terrible for those children and their families. It's also much more costly for the State of Maine to serve those children in out of state residential programs than serving those children in state would be, as is remaining in a hospital or ED settings.

LD1745 will help address this issue in a number of ways:

First, it will ensure that the HHS Committee is informed when more child residential programs close; second, that DHHS convene a stakeholder's group focused on resources needed to sustain and strengthen child residential services; third, that DHHS report on the costs of children in hospitals and out of state placements; fourth, that DHHS update and improve the payment model for aftercare services; and finally, that DHHS establish a \$1m emergency stabilization fund to help avoid more of these now scarce programs from closing.

The children we serve and the system to support them is in crisis. Thank you for considering these important issues. We need your help; please vote in favor of LD1745. I'm happy to take any questions.