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Testimony of Rep. Julie McCabe introducing
LD 2125, An Act to Sustain Access to Children's Residential Care Services

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and my esteemed colleagues on the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Julie McCabe, and I am honored to represent District 93, which includes a part of Lewiston. I stand before you today in support of **LD 2125, An Act to Sustain Access to Children's Residential Care Services**. This bill would establish an emergency rate increase and a stabilization fund for children's residential care facilities which provide life-saving mental and behavioral healthcare for Maine teenagers – and too many of which are on the brink of closing.

Though I know you have heard this information before, it bears repeating. Over the past two decades, countless providers, and with them hundreds of children's residential beds, shuttered due to financial challenges. In the past year alone, one hundred beds were closed. And just last April, 33 additional beds were taken offline. What remains for Maine teens are 130 licensed beds in the entire state. And what these numbers mean is that kids, in likely all of our districts, are suffering without access to the level of care they need and deserve.

Without the correct level of care, kids experiencing severe crisis too often find themselves in emergency department rooms. I walked through the emergency department floor at Central Maine Medical Center over the summer and saw for myself where kids are forced to spend days, weeks and even months. It is nothing short of heartbreaking to think of a child, through no fault of their own, living in a windowless room for 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The isolation and sterile quality of that 8 by 8 room, compounded by the stress of the medical emergencies just outside your door, creates a recipe for disaster, further decline and is frankly inhumane.

Because of the lack of available beds in Maine, we have a situation where children with complex behavioral and mental health needs are forced to seek care out of the state. Currently, 67 Maine children live in seven other states across the country, as far away as Florida and Missouri. And for the nearly 500 day average stay away from their community and home, we have no idea how often children and their families are visiting with each other. But we know this kind of separation is never good for children and must be a very heavy burden for parents to bear.

Further, for many of the Mainers who are able to receive this critical healthcare, only 23% receive care in their home county. Meaning teens from Aroostook County may receive treatment

down in Lewiston, where a two-hour home visit becomes an eight-hour round trip on 95 – if staff are available, if weather conditions are favorable, if everything goes right. So unfortunately, like so many of our healthcare services in Maine, kids from rural parts of our state find services furthest from reach.

Finally, there are currently 76 children on the waitlist for Children's Residential Care Facility services. Combined with the 67 residing out of state, we would need to double the current number of beds available in Maine to truly address this issue.

I am grateful for the meetings I have had with the department so far and more so for the recent decision to include children's residential care facilities in their revised list for 2026 rate increases. However, I still feel strongly that the Legislature should invest in the stabilization fund included in this bill because without that funding source, it is likely we will continue to see providers close while the rate review process takes place. And in that time, more Maine children could go without services, left to contend with acute behavioral health needs on their own.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.