



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

Malory Otteson Shaughnessy, Executive Director

Testimony in Support of LD 118
An Act To Address Maine's Shortage of Behavioral Health
Services for Minors

Sponsored by Rep. McCreight

2.11.2021

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Good morning Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. I am Malory Shaughnessy, a resident of Westbrook, and the Executive Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services. The Alliance is the statewide association representing the majority of Maine's safety net community based mental health and substance use treatment providers. 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 118, An Act To Address Maine's Shortage of Behavioral Health Services for Minors.

With this bill, the department is required to track the situation of children being "stuck" in our Emergency Departments and unable to be placed appropriately for treatment, and to then submit a report to your committee with annual data and any department efforts to reduce the number of these children and their lengths of stay. The department is also required to promote and improve the use of the current children's behavioral health program coordinators within the Office of Child and Family Services to assist hospitals to place children in more appropriate behavioral health settings and report its effort there as well.

The Alliance and its members agree that having good data is important to inform our system of care, and to base our policies and initiatives on. So, we support this legislation to begin to more carefully track the barriers to appropriate care for these children stuck in the ERs, most of whom are struggling with mental health and/or substance use challenges.

We also had heard that there would be an amendment to actually have the Children's Cabinet do the reviewing and tracking of data. We would support this change, as this would in many ways be a better fit as it brings together other departments and breaks down some of the silos in the systems that our youth move through.

On that note, we want to point out that emergency departments are not the only place that children become "stuck". We have many children in placement at Long Creek that truly do not belong there. There was a recent task force that already gathered some of this data and found many gaps in the system of care. Adding this data on a regular basis to the data collected in this new process would be important to get a fuller picture of needs of children in Maine.

Some data points from the [Maine Juvenile Justice System Assessment](#) produced in 2020 by the Juvenile Justice Task Force, point out that:

- In 53% of cases, the reason for detention at Long Creek was to “provide care” for youth.
- Many youth are also in detention due to a lack of community-based alternatives and wait lists for existing programs.

This is current data we already have, but these barriers also need to be tracked and merged with this new data.

We also need to look at other existing data we have from the Office of Child and Family Services about the number of children on wait lists for Home and Community Treatment for behavioral health challenges, and those “stuck” out of state in residential settings far from home due to the lack of services here in Maine.

All of this data should be combined to see the full picture of the gaps and needs in our system of care for our most vulnerable children.

So, while we support this legislation and these new data points being tracked, we believe that these other data points should be brought together. We also believe that the Children’s Cabinet rather than the DHHS should be the entity pulling this data together to cut across all of these silos.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and to Rep. McCreight for bringing this issue forward. I would be happy to get more data for the work session or answer any questions today.