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Dear Members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

As a child and adolescent psychiatric physician, I am writing to request that you support LD 118, An Act to Address Maine's Shortage of Behavioral Health Services for Minors. Why we child and adolescent psychiatrists have many, many anecdotal reports on kids stuck in Emergency Departments, compiling data on this issue is the first step in solving it. Although COVID-19 has caused significant budgetary issues, the cost of this does not seem especially prohibitive.

We are in the midst of the mental health wave of the pandemic and personally I have never had so many referrals for youth (and college aged adults) with depression, anxiety, and suicidal thinking. Many of these kids end up in Emergency Departments. Depending on the hospital, some are better equipped than others to manage a psychiatric emergency, making access to psychiatric hospital even more important. Yet too often hospital beds are not available.

A recent example: a schizophrenic teen with an acute exacerbation of psychosis a medication change spent over a week in an ED because no hospital beds were available. When became clear that no beds would be opening in the short term, the medication change was initiated in the ED and he was discharged from the ED mid-transition from one med to another.

For I hope obvious reasons, trying to change a psychotropic medication in a non-psychiatric ED for an acutely psychotic youth (in the midst of a pandemic risking his exposure to SARS-CoV-2) was inadequate care, but sadly the best we as a state were able to provide.

I strongly urge you to support LD118.