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Testimony of the
Office of Aging and Disability Services
Department of Health and Human Services

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human

In Support of
LD 577 Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Chapter 6: Crisis Prevention and Intervention Services, a Major Substantive Rule of the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Aging and Disability Services

Sponsored by: Representative Meyer
Hearing Date: March 18, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Elizabeth Hopkins, the Associate Director of Developmental Disability and Brain Injury Services at the Office of Aging and Disability Services. I am here today to speak in support of LD 577, A Resolve Regarding Legislative Review of Chapter 6: Crisis Prevention and Intervention Services, a Major Substantive Rule of the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Aging and Disability Services

This department bill is to introduce a new substantive rule, describing the operation of crisis prevention and intervention services within the Office of Aging and Disability Services.

In 2019, LD 1486, *An Act To Strengthen Supports for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities or Autism in Crisis*, was introduced by Representative Farnsworth of Portland in the First Regular Session of the 129th. That bill required the Department of Health and Human Services to provide a system of crisis and respite services specific to persons with intellectual disabilities or autism and their families. OADS already had a system to provide crisis intervention and prevention services, but without rules under Chapter 14-197 for this program. The original bill required the Department to adopt rules by January 1, 2020 (by major substantive rule). An amendment later wholly replaced the bill simply requiring DHHS to provisionally adopt rules on crisis and respite services no later than April 1, 2020. Due to COVID-19, Legislative review was not possible last year for the April deadline, so the rule has been submitted for this session.

OADS currently provides statewide crisis services for adults with developmental disabilities and/or brain injuries – and these services are provided 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Crisis services include assistance to individuals, families, guardians and providers before, during, and after crisis incidents. When necessary, an individual in crisis may be supported in one of four state-operated crisis homes or with another contracted short-term residential provider. However,

the goal of crisis services is to avoid removing people from their home or community whenever possible, or when removal is necessary, to help them return home or identify a safe alternative, as quickly as possible.

OADS has made significant improvements to the crisis services system. Notably, eight staff have been added to the district offices to provide crisis response services, as well as outreach and prevention services. All crisis staff are being trained to adhere to an evidence-based approach to crisis management and the Department has contracted with the University of New Hampshire to provide ongoing consultation and training through their nationally recognized START program. OADS has procured a new phone system, which will route calls directly to on-call crisis staff located in the same region as the caller. In 2019, 78% of contacts and support by the OADS crisis team was provided over the phone. During the pandemic especially, this phone support provided immediate access to crucial information, support and guidance to individuals and providers.

Crisis Prevention and Intervention Services delivered by the Office of Aging and Disability Services will not substantially change under this rulemaking. The Department was providing these services prior to the rule-making process and the newly drafted rule does not substantially modify or change any crisis services practices; it only enshrines them in this rule. As described above, the State currently provides crisis intervention and prevention services through the Office of Aging and Disability Services and as a result, outside providers should not be impacted by this rule.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill to adopt this substantive rule change. I am happy to answer questions now or I can make myself available for the work session.