



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 343

AN ACT TO SET ASIDE FUNDS FROM FEDERAL BLOCK GRANTS FOR CERTAIN COMMUNITIES

Sponsored by Representative Rachel Talbot Ross

March 24, 2021

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Good afternoon Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and 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 membership represents the majority of Maine's 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.

Given that the member agencies of the Alliance are providers of behavioral health safety net services across the state of Maine, funded largely through federal block grants and MaineCare reimbursements, they are currently providing services to some of the most vulnerable members of our communities. The two federal block grants that provide funding towards this safety net system of care are the [Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant \(SABG\)](#) and the [Community Mental Health Services Block Grant \(MHBG\)](#)

Grantees of the SABG use the funds to plan, implement, and evaluate activities that prevent and treat substance use disorder and promote public health.

Grantees of the MHBG use the funds to provide comprehensive, community-based mental health services to adults with serious mental illnesses and to children with serious emotional disturbances and to monitor progress in implementing a comprehensive, community-based mental health system.

The Alliance fully supports the principles embodied in LD 343 to direct block grant funding to those most in need. LD 343 does not specify what is meant by "vulnerable communities," but we feel certain that far more than 20% of the recipients of services through Alliance member agencies would meet even the most stringent definition already.

The Alliance also support efforts to ensure that Maine's Tribal Health District receive an equitable share of these critical behavioral health service dollars. We do not have the data on where these dollars currently go as these block grants are managed through the Office of Behavioral Health (OBH). Alliance members make up only a part of the total recipients of these dollars.

We would suggest that the OBH be asked to provide data to this committee for the work session to show current spending patterns and levels of the total of these block grants.

The one concern we want to share with the committee is that these dollars do not currently reach nearly enough Maine families struggling with mental health or substance use challenges, so access is already limited. We would hate to see some current programs cut in order to meet the requirements of this legislation. A recommended amendment we would urge the Committee to entertain, would be to add some matching state general fund dollars be added to offset this equity initiative.

With this addition, we urge the committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 343.

Thank you for your time and attention to this issue.