

Testimony to the
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
March 25, 2021

My name is Jeffrey Hecker. I am Professor of Psychology at the University of Maine and I write in support of LD674 **An Act To Support Early Intervention and Treatment of Psychotic Disorders**. I have been working with the leadership of Acadia Hospital to realize their vision of creating a Center of Excellence for Schizophrenia devoted to evidence-based treatment, research and education related to this serious mental health disorder and related conditions. The first phase of the university's participation in this project involved a review of the clinical research literature related to early intervention with people showing signs of serious mental illness. Our review found that early intervention programs that included coordinated specialty care, as defined in LD674, were effective at reducing the severity of psychotic symptoms and the need for hospitalization as well as improving quality of life and involvement in work or school for individuals showing early signs of psychosis.

The PIER Program at Maine Medical Center has emerged as a national leader in early psychosis treatment. Currently, Pier is the only program in Maine through which individual can receive coordinate specialty care for early psychosis. Our colleagues in the Pier Program have been generous in sharing their time and expertise as we develop the Center of Excellence. In addition to the Pier Program, we have formed partnerships with Maine Medical Center Research Institute, Massachusetts General Hospital's Schizophrenia Clinical & Research Program, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, and the University of Maine at Machias. These partnerships will be essential to fulfilling the Center of Excellence's treatment-research-education missions.

The next step in the development of the Center is to create an evidence-based first-episode psychosis treatment program to serve Central, Northern and Downeast Maine. The research is clear that coordinated specialty care is key to successful intervention with individuals experiencing an initial psychotic episode. Unfortunately, one of the main impediments to providing coordinated specialty care is the extant guidelines for MaineCare reimbursement. LD674 addresses this impediment. The establishment of a reimbursement rate for coordinated specialty care to treat individuals showing early signs of psychosis will create a funding mechanism that will allow for mental health care providers to develop evidence-based programs to serve individuals in underserved areas of the state. The first episode psychosis treatment program will be the hub around which education and research will develop at the Center of Excellence.

I encourage you to pass LD674 so that more Mainers can receive the benefit of evidence-based early intervention for psychosis.

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