

Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee Health and Human Services Cross Building, Thursday, March 25, 2021

Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

I am writing in support of LD 674, "An Act to Support Early Interventions and Treatment of Mental Health Disorders.

When our daughter was in her sophomore year of high school, we started to notice that there were subtle changes in her thinking. Initially we had her seen by our local pediatrician and psychiatrist and were reassured that what we were seeing was likely due to too little sleep and too much social media use. Unfortunately, just before she started her junior year of high school she developed very disorganized thinking and manic symptoms. She again saw our local psychiatrist and was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and started on medication. She refused recommended counseling. While the medicine helped, she continued to have periodic exacerbations and our family felt like we didn't have much guidance or support. Then just before starting her senior year of high school, she had another particularly bad manic episode. We knew we needed to do something different and reached out to the the PIER program that we had heard of. That same day the social worker called us back, learned our story, spoke with our daughter and made arrangements for us to come down to Portland and meet with the team the next day. Over the past two and a half years we have participated in many of the programs that PIER offers including counseling for both our daughter and our family, visits with the PIER psychiatrist, meeting with the vocational education specialist, meetings with other families in settings inclusive of the patient with symptoms and siblings and meetings just for parents. While the PIER program has not solved all our problems, it has given us a multitude of resources for building on our strengths, identifying problems early on and most importantly preserving hope that we as a family and our daughter can look forward to a bright future. Currently our daughter is working full time at a local preschool and is registered to attend the University of Maine, Farmington in the fall to study early childhood education.

While the local medical, psychiatric and social work providers are well meaning and try to be helpful, the current system of psychiatric care is incredibly fragmented and often difficult to access. The well coordinated and comprehensive approach offered by PIER is vastly superior and deserves to be made much more widely available. To participate in PIER, our family has made many 90 minute trips from Damariscotta to Portland. We have been happy to invest that time in our daughter's future, but where you live in Maine should not dictate whether or not your child can receive high quality psychiatric care. We strongly encourage you to support this legislation so families across the state can have access to the resources that have made so much of a difference for our family and our daughter.

Sincerely, Karen Kleinkopf and Tim Goltz, MD