

Center for Psychiatric Research



March 24, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, 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.”

My career as a clinical social worker began in 1992 in outpatient community mental health in Saco, ME. Subsequent work in Child Psychiatry at Maine Medical Center helping adolescents and families navigate the onset of mental health challenges inspired me to pursue my Ph.D. in psychology at Harvard University. I returned to Maine in 2018 as a Faculty Scientist at Maine Medical Center Research Institute conducting research in the early detection and course of major mental illness.

Over nearly 30 years, I have witnessed Maine play an important national and international leadership role in developing and advancing the care of young people at imminent risk for and in the early phases of the most serious of mental health disorders. This has always involved multi-disciplinary team-based care that strengthened the natural supports of youth and families, helping them move from crisis to recovery. Over the last several years, federal support for coordinated specialty care (CSC), the type of evidence-based treatment advocated for in this bill, has expanded national networks of specialty care like that pioneered in Maine. Adolescents and young adults are finding meaning, connection, and livelihoods who might otherwise be institutionalized, isolated, unemployed.

Unfortunately, federal grant support covers the cost of this recommended care for only a fraction of the youth and families who need it. With the expansion of telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic bringing the single CSC program in Maine, the PIER program, within the reach of any Mainer, the inadequacy of current funding to staff this level of care has become painfully clear. This bill couldn't be timelier. Sustainable funding will make high quality team-based care available across Maine, improving the chances that Maine youth in the early stages of a psychotic or other serious mental health disorder receive the comprehensive care needed to make the successful transition to a meaningful and productive adulthood.

Passing this bill will also support the community-based infrastructure (well-trained clinical teams across the state) to leverage additional funds from service and research grants. Maine is rich with

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innovators whose ideas could be tested and implemented within this context, allowing the state to once again lead the way in prevention and early intervention in youth mental health.

I am writing to ask you to make early intervention in major mental illness a priority in Maine, just as prevention of physical illness is a priority. Passing this bill will have long-lasting effects for Maine's youth, for preventing traumatizing and expensive hospitalizations, for assuring their opportunity to contribute to Maine's culture and economy, and for strengthening Maine's scientific and therapeutic resources and leadership.

Please let me know if I can answer any questions. Please support LD 674.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Kristen A. Woodberry". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kristen A. Woodberry, MSW, Ph.D.