

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL KEBEDE, Esq.

LD 432 – Ought to Pass

An Act To Provide Maine Children Access to Affordable Health Care

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

April 2, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, good morning. My name is Michael Kebede, and I am policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine, a statewide organization committed to advancing and preserving civil liberties guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions through advocacy, education, and litigation. On behalf of our members, we urge you to support LD 432, which would help Maine take a small but crucial step toward healing our young people.

This bill would increase the types of children’s mental health and community-based treatment covered by MaineCare and help strengthen Maine’s behavioral health infrastructure. This is a necessary component of reducing the harmful impact of our criminal legal system. For too many Maine children, the juvenile justice system has become the default provider of behavioral and mental health services. According to perhaps the most rigorous study about juvenile justice ever conducted in Maine, the reason for more than half of the detention cases at Long Creek was to “provide care” for a young person.¹ 69% of youth currently committed in Long Creek received behavioral health services through MaineCare the year before they were committed.² 71% of that group received the most intensive form of behavioral health services

¹ Maine Juvenile Justice System Assessment & Reinvestment Task Force Report at 8, *available at* <https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/de726780/files/uploaded/Maine%20Juvenile%20Justice%20System%20Assessment%20FINAL%20REPORT%202-25-20.pdf>; *see generally* Maine Juvenile Justice System Assessment & Reinvestment Task Force, Website, *available at* www.mainejjtaskforce.org/about. The taskforce was created by the 129th Legislature’s LD 1108, which is *available at* <http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/getPDF.asp?paper=HP0812&item=1&snum=129>.

² Task Force Report at 9.

before being sent to Long Creek.³ And yet, correctional officers are not mental health service providers and youth prison creates additional trauma rather than healing it. To remedy this problem, the report recommended strengthening the continuum of community health programs. This bill would do just that.

We urge you to vote *ought to pass*.

³ *Id.* at 107.