



# 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 1059

### An Act To Provide Substance Use Disorder Treatment to Adolescents

Sponsored by Representative Morales on April 6, 2021

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Good morning Senator Claxton, Representative Meyers, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. I am Malory Shaughnessy, resident of Westbrook, and Executive Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services. Please accept this testimony on behalf of the Alliance in Support of LD 1059.

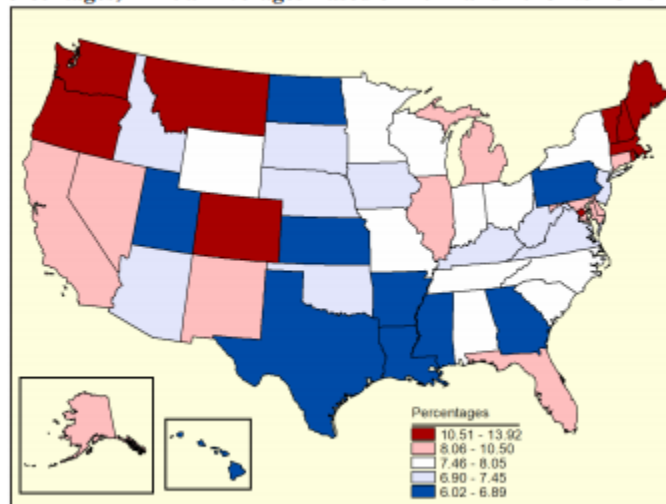
First off, the Alliance wants to thank Representative Morales for bringing this legislation forward. We also want to thank the Office of Child and Family Services, and many others in the Department of Health and Human Services, for coming together to collaboratively work toward finding solutions for this serious problem in Maine.

Over the past few years, starting even before the pandemic, providers in Maine were seeing an uptick in complex cases of poly substance use in teens and emergency departments were seeing more youth showing up due to substance use and suicide attempts.

Maine has one of the highest rates of youth suicide and the highest percentage of mental health problems among youth,<sup>1</sup> and we know this correlates with substance use. Studies have shown that two-thirds of youth who develop alcohol or substance use disorders have experienced at least one mental health disorder.<sup>2</sup>

The figures below, from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health<sup>3</sup>, show that Maine ranks in the top percentile for youth substance use.

**Figure 1b Illicit Drug Use in the Past Month among Youths Aged 12 to 17, by State: Percentages, Annual Averages Based on 2017 and 2018 NSDUHs**



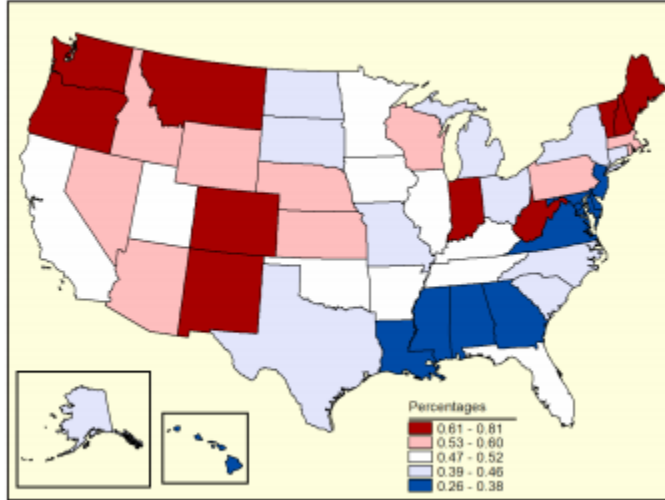
Source: SAMHSA, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, NSDUH, 2017 and 2018.

<sup>1</sup> <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2724377>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27015718>

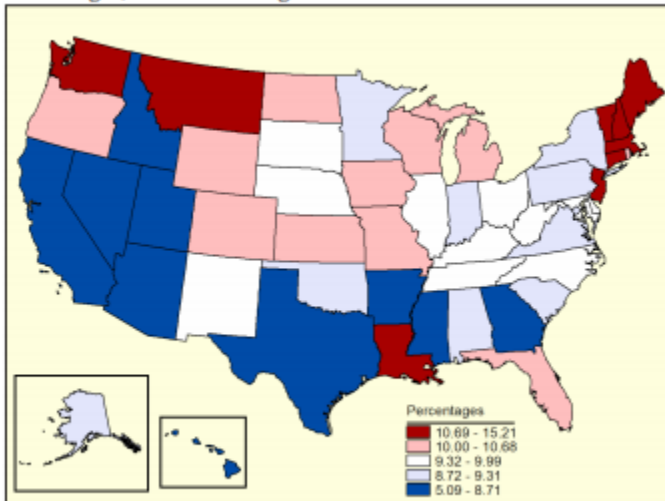
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt23238/NSDUHsaeMaps2018/NSDUHsaeMaps2018.pdf>

**Figure 7b Cocaine Use in the Past Year among Youths Aged 12 to 17, by State: Percentages, Annual Averages Based on 2017 and 2018 NSDUHs**



Source: SAMHSA, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, NSDUH, 2017 and 2018.

**Figure 13b Alcohol Use in the Past Month among Youths Aged 12 to 17, by State: Percentages, Annual Averages Based on 2017 and 2018 NSDUHs**



Source: SAMHSA, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, NSDUH, 2017 and 2018.

COVID-19 has only compounded these issues by reducing youth contact with school and other community supports, and disrupting social and community networks.

In Maine, according to CDC data, the number of youths with suicidal thoughts has almost doubled since the start of the pandemic.

Thankfully, there is a growing recognition that this situation is rising to crisis levels in Maine. The Office of Child and Family Services recently received a grant from the John T. Gorman Foundation to hire a coordinator for substance use services for youth. They have also applied for a federal SAMHSA grant to develop evidence-based treatment services for youth in Maine. The Alliance supports this step and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the department in support of this grant, **but there is no guarantee that Maine will receive it.**

Regardless of whether or not Maine receives this grant, we should be investing some of the federal covid relief dollars into addressing this growing problem. There is immediate need for youth, sometimes not yet 12 years old, and addicted to multiple, sometimes unknown substances, to have medically monitored and safe withdrawal in what can be a life-threatening situation. There is also the need for more youth tailored, and family focused, intensive outpatient substance use treatment.

Lack of effective treatment in the teen years has impacts for the entire lifespan. "When substance use disorders occur in adolescence, they affect key developmental and social transitions, and they can interfere with normal brain maturation," the National Institute on Drug Abuse reported in 2014<sup>4</sup>. "These potentially lifelong consequences make addressing adolescent drug use an urgent matter."

This bill remains in a concept form as many stakeholders are currently engaged in working with the department towards the best response to this matter.

With the understanding that we need to move rapidly, we respectfully request that this bill be held by the committee as we work out these details. We need this legislative vehicle to remain viable, to address additional resources or policy changes needed before the end of this session.

Please support this request, and this bill as it is finalized, as the future of many of our young people depends upon it. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/principles-adolescent-substance-use-disorder-treatment-research-based-guide/acknowledgements>