



Testimony of Helen Hemminger
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LD 1173, An Act To Develop a Plan To Treat in Maine Those Children with Behavioral Health Needs
Currently Treated Outside the State
4/7/2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Helen Hemminger, and I am offering testimony on behalf of the Maine Children's Alliance. Our organization is a public policy, nonprofit improving the lives of Maine children, youth and families through research, collaboration, and advocacy. For over 25 years, MCA has promoted sound policies and best practices to make sure all Maine children have the resources and opportunity to reach their full potential from birth to adulthood.

We believe that when residential treatment for youth is necessary because of severe behavioral health issues that this treatment should be intensive, short-term and happen close to the child's home. Further, our children are best treated by remaining in the state of Maine. We are concerned that on December 31, 2019 and on December 31, 2020, there were 61 youth being treated out of state – some as far away as Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, and Michigan. This is harmful and painful for youth as they are separated from the support of their families.

The pandemic put additional strain on the youths and families involved, as it was harder than ever to visit, with both personal visitations and interstate travel restricted. Further, at least one large out-of-state treatment facility that was providing residential treatment to about 40 Maine youth had a major COVID outbreak in April 2020 when 19 youth there tested positive. At 75 beds, this facility is much larger and more institutional than any Maine residential treatment program for youth. [New-hampshire-coronavirus-update-april-17-2020](#)

By contrast, when COVID-19 struck, Maine juvenile correction system immediately began planning to release youth who could be safely released, and their numbers went down by 40 percent within one month. It is unfortunate that it appears that the same focused effort was not undertaken to ensure youth in out-of-state residential treatment were protected from the risk of COVID in congregate settings.

Clearly more must be done. It is important that the state create and commit to a plan to bring these youth back into the state for their care and treatment, where they can also be better connected to family and community. For this reason, we support LD 1173. In these times, it is more critical than ever to bring Maine children home and keep these children safe.

Thank you.

Helen Hemminger