



# 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 1173

### Resolve, To Develop a Plan To Treat in Maine Those Children with Behavioral Health Needs Currently Treated Outside the State

Sponsored by Representative Gramlich

April 7, 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 1173.

As many of you remember, in the 129<sup>th</sup> Legislature, LD 984 was brought forward by Representative Gramlich and was voted out of this committee with a unanimous "Ought to Pass as Amended." The amendment was very simple.

**"Resolved:** That the Department of Health and Human Services through its case managers shall coordinate with families of children who are receiving residential treatment services for behavioral health issues out of state to develop plans to bring the children back to the State to receive the required services ... The department shall negotiate reimbursement rates as necessary to find providers under Section 97 to provide services to children returning to the State, including deviating from the reimbursement rates established by department rules in order to access additional services."

The House and Senate read and approved this bill on May 29th, and the Governor signed it on June 6<sup>th</sup> of 2019. That was 671 days ago from today.

In June of 2019, there were 58 youth placed in MaineCare contracted residential facilities out of state. As of February 2021, there were 78. I could not find the number of children in residential services in state for June 2019, but in January of 2020, there were 295 youth receiving services in state. As of February 2021, there are 232. I would hazard a guess that the reduction in the numbers in state receiving services was not because they were all discharged in fine shape.

In these two years since LD 984 was signed by the Governor, there have been a number of children's residential service homes that have closed, there have been dozens of beds within the remaining homes simply shut off due to the inability to pay staff enough to come and do this very meaningful, but hard work, of caring for children with intense mental health and behavioral challenges.

We should also note that the Office of Child and Family Services is doing some very good work. They have sought grants and federal funding for trainings in some evidence-based therapies, to expand some of the services offered, and are looking at the system of care for youth now starting in three counties, and are hoping to reach all counties statewide in four years.

**Maine children in need, and their families, do not have that long. They simply cannot wait any longer.**

Every day that a child does not get the support and the services they need makes their long-term prognosis worse. Every day that a child cannot see their parents or connect with their family makes that child a little bit more detached.

It has been 671 of these days since you passed a resolution that instructed the department to “negotiate reimbursement rates as necessary to find providers” to return children to the State and their families. They were given the directive of even “deviating from the reimbursement rates established by department rules in order to access additional services”.

But there was no money attached to this directive. It has been 671 days and more children are out of state and more treatment beds have closed down in Maine.

And we are only talking about residential services here. The continued loss of providers in the home and community services due to stagnant rates and workforce shortages only compounds these problems.

The state of Maine needs to step up and make a real plan that will invest in the services that will grow us the citizens of our future. Please support this resolution and do your oversight job.

Please tell the department that within 30 days after this legislation takes effect, you want to see a plan for implementing the Resolve signed by the Governor 671 days ago. They need to be straight with this committee and clearly lay out what it would take to expand home and community treatment to end the waitlists, what it would take to provide funding to providers and their staff to be able to open up some of the closed beds, what it would take to retrofit a few residential homes to the more secure environment that some of these youth need to be safe from harming themselves or others.

You would only be asking for a plan to do this work – and to tell you what they need to do it.

It has been 671 days already.

I want to thank the sponsors - Rep. Gramlich and several others on this committee – for continuing to bring this issue forward. And thank you to the committee for the long hours and hard work you are doing every day. I would be happy to bring any other information you need for the work session on this bill.

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*With 35 members, the **Alliance** is the state association for Maine’s community based mental health and substance use treatment providers. The **Alliance** advocates for the implementation of sound policies and evidence-based practices that serve to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our behavioral health care system. All Mainers should have full access to the continuum of recovery-oriented systems of care for mental illness and substance use disorder – from prevention through treatment and into peer recovery support.*