



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Rep. Michele Meyer presenting

LD 1470, Resolve, Regarding Reimbursement for Providing Inpatient Care to Individuals with Acute Mental Health Care Needs

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Claxton and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Michele Meyer, proudly serving Southern Maine's House District 2 and presenting to you today **LD 1470, "Resolve, Regarding Reimbursement for Providing Inpatient Care to Individuals with Acute Mental Health Care Needs."**

This is a simple bill. It requires the department to provide the new behavioral health beds in Sanford with a MaineCare rate that covers their costs. It was brought before the Health and Human Services Committee in the 129th Legislature as LD 1856, and it passed unanimously. It was awaiting legislative action when we adjourned early due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we have heard several times this Session, Maine's acute care hospitals are experiencing significant growth in the number of patients with mental illness and other behavioral health needs over the last few years. The pandemic has exacerbated the problem even further. Southern Maine Health Care has experienced particular challenges, as it saw its volume of patients needing psychiatric care increasing by 41% between 2017 and 2019. The hospital had a 12-bed psychiatric unit that was insufficient to the community's needs, with over 20% of the county's residents needing inpatient psychiatric care sent to hospitals outside of the region.

MaineHealth embarked on a formal needs assessment and, based on the data, created a plan to repurpose two vacant units on the Goodall campus in Sanford to create up to 42 beds – 12 of which would replace the existing capacity at Biddeford and the remaining 30 would be available to better meet the needs of York and Cumberland Counties.

In 2018, the department agreed that expanded inpatient capacity was needed and it agreed to work with MaineHealth to develop a rate to cover the cost of treating MaineCare patients in the new facility. At the

time, MaineCare rates for psychiatric treatment, which have not changed since 2011, were 33% below the cost of delivering care. The department asked that a final rate not be developed until the impact of MaineCare expansion could be factored into the calculation. MaineHealth agreed.

MaineHealth went ahead and invested in what is now a wonderful treatment option for individuals experiencing psychiatric crisis; the units are calming, state of the art and free of stigma. As a nurse, I can tell you that the treatment milieu they have created is just what individuals with acute psychiatric illness need to improve. We are so fortunate to have this investment in Maine, and it is filling a critical gap in care.

The units are run by Maine Behavioral Healthcare, and they have deliberately increased their capacity slowly since they opened last fall. Today, the average daily census is almost twice the capacity of the former unit in Biddeford. They have added 50 FTEs thus far, which will expand when both units are fully staffed and operational. Most importantly, they are meeting a critical need in our community.

I'm sorry that we have to introduce this bill. An agreement between the department and MaineHealth was reached. However, it has not been fulfilled. MaineHealth made a significant and good faith investment in meeting a critical community need with the understanding that the department would cover the cost for MaineCare patients. This bill will ensure that the department stands by the agreement that was made.

Thank you.