



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony in Support of:
LD 1470, "Resolve To Support Individuals with Acute Mental Health Needs"
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Representative Beth O'Connor, Representative for House District 5, which includes the towns of Berwick and part of North Berwick and I am here today to speak in support of LD 1470, "Resolve, To Support Individuals with Acute Mental Health Needs. "

This committee unanimously passed LD 1856 last year unanimously, but like so many other bills it was not acted on due to the Coronavirus pandemic. I was happy to co-sponsor this again.

This Committee has heard testimony countless times about the crisis our hospitals are facing with patients stuck in their emergency departments waiting for an inpatient psychiatric bed. One might think that our more urban areas of the state would be immune to this crisis, but in York and Cumberland Counties, 21% of these patients have been sent outside of the service area for treatment due to a lack of beds. In fact, it's not unheard of for patients from York and Cumberland Counties to be sent to Lewiston, Bangor and even Northern Maine Medical Center in Fort Kent for care.

To help address this growing need, Maine Health and Southern Maine Health Care had undertaken a project to create up to 40 psychiatric beds and a psychiatric emergency room on the Goodall Campus in Sanford. In preparing for this project, it was determined that the MaineCare rate for inpatient psychiatric treatment, which had not changed since 2011, is significantly less than the cost of taking care of MaineCare patients. As such, Maine Health met with the Department of Health and Human Services now almost three years ago on the project and the need for an adequate reimbursement rate. The Department supported the proposal and agreed to Work with Maine Health on developing a rate that would support the cost of caring for these patients. As a result of what they thought was the Department's support, Maine Health proceeded with project, which last year was approximately two-thirds complete, however, the Department of Health and Human Services informed Maine Health that it would not support the adoption of a new rate until the comprehensive Medicaid rate study is complete.

Maine Health has already made significant financial investments in this project under the good faith that the Department would deliver on its promise and cover the cost of services for MaineCare patients. While I agree that a review of the MaineCare rates is critical, a promise was made by the Department and that promise should be upheld.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,

Beth O'Connor
State Representative

House District 5 Berwick & North Berwick (part)