

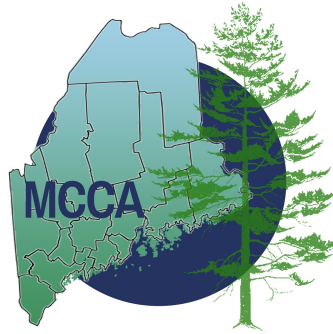
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LD 1586, Act To Strengthen Statewide Mental Health Peer Support, Crisis Intervention Mobile Response and Crisis Stabilization Unit Services and To Allow E-9-1-1 To Dispatch Using the Crisis System

May 3, 2021

Chair Claxton, Chair Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, and my name is Stephen Gorden and, in addition to serving as chair of the board of commissioners for Cumberland County, I am writing today in my role as board president of the Maine County Commissioners Association. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony to the Committee in support of LD 1586.

About MCCA. Briefly, the Maine County Commissioners Association was established in 1890 to assist Maine's county government in providing vital services to Maine citizens in a responsive, efficient, and credible manner. The Association is based in Augusta and currently represents 15 of Maine's 16 counties and is governed by a board with representation from each participating county.

About LD 1586. As we read LD 1586, it directs the Department of Health and Human Services to strengthen mental health peer support services by providing increased resources to the statewide crisis lines and statewide "warmlines" in order to provide effective, efficient services in the least restrictive manner 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The bill further directs the Department to provide a number of additional resources, including: (1) certified intentional peer support specialists and recovery coaches, (2) mental health law enforcement officer liaisons co-located in law enforcement agencies, and (3) mental health professionals with crisis services expertise at E-9-1-1 dispatch centers. Our Association is supportive of the intent of this bill, which we understand to be directing DHHS to increase and improve access to resources for people in our communities who are experiencing crises related to mental health, substance use, and other situations that lead people to come into contact with emergency response and law enforcement agencies.

Maine counties provide law enforcement services throughout the State of Maine. Maine's county jails provide services to thousands of incarcerated individuals. Counties also provide valuable public safety answering and dispatching services to fire, police, and rescue departments in many communities around the state. In many circumstances, the individuals with whom county law enforcement and corrections officials come in contact have underlying mental health issues. In fact, nearly 70% of all inmates in county jails receive some sort of psychotropic medication during their time of incarceration. As we read LD 1586, it is aimed at providing appropriate services to such individuals when they first encounter emergency response or law enforcement, in order to head off the possibility that they may inappropriately end up in the criminal justice system.

Comments of MCCA re LD 1586

May 3, 2021

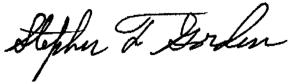
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We appreciate that this bill includes General Fund appropriations to fund these additional crisis response resources, both within DHHS and also within law enforcement, E-9-1-1 dispatch, and other community-based entities. Providing funding for these services will be important, as any increase in responsibilities at the county level, without accompanying State monies, would fall to county taxpayers to fund.

It seems clear to our Association that additional work will need to be done, if this bill should pass, in order to implement these additional crisis response services in a way that works well for all stakeholders and serves the needs of our communities. Our Association would be happy to work with DHHS and other stakeholders to assist with this implementation process.

Conclusion. For these reasons, our Association supports LD 1586, and we encourage the Committee to give this bill an “ought to pass” report.

Respectfully submitted,



Stephen Gorden
President

cc: Commissioner Brian Hobart, Chair, MCCA Legislative Committee
James I. Cohen, Verrill Dana, LLP, MCCA Legislative Counsel