

Janet T. Mills  
Governor

Jeanne M. Lambrew, Ph.D.  
Commissioner



Maine Department of Health and Human Services  
Office of Behavioral Health  
11 State House Station  
41 Anthony Avenue  
Augusta, Maine 04333-0011  
Tel: (207) 287-2595; Fax: (207) 287-9152  
TTY: Dial 711 (Maine Relay)

Testimony of the Office of Behavioral Health  
Department of Health and Human Services

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human

In Opposition to LD 1586

An 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

Sponsored by: Representative Warren

Hearing Date: May 3, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Dr. Jessica Pollard, Director of the Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) in the Department of Health and Human Services. I am here today to provide information and speak to our concerns related to LD 1586, An 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.

We are pleased to report that with current implementation underway of a Crisis Center that includes short term observation and crisis stabilization services, Maine will have all three of the components of National Best Practices in Behavioral Health Crisis Care: someone to talk to, someone to respond, and somewhere to go. The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) considers a centralized statewide crisis line, mobile crisis teams, and Crisis Centers the gold standard in crisis care. Individuals experiencing a mental health crisis in Maine have access to the DHHS funded 24/7 Statewide Maine Crisis Line (MCL) for phone/text/SMS support. Most calls are resolved without further intervention; those deemed at imminent risk are triaged to emergency response; and the rest are referred to their district Mobile Crisis Team. DHHS funds 24/7 Mobile Crisis teams in all counties via contracts and MaineCare reimbursement.

We are proud of the work of our crisis providers. Over the past year, on average 17% of calls to the MCL were referred to mobile crisis; average response time for the MCL is 6 seconds, 83% of adults and 81% of children were seen by mobile crisis within 2 hours, and 66% of adults and children were seen in less than 1 hour. On average 2.5% were involuntarily hospitalized and 18% voluntarily psychiatrically hospitalized. Combined, the Department funds the MCL, Mobile Crisis, and Crisis Residential to the tune of over \$43M a year, not inclusive of OCFS support for Children's Crisis services, totaling over \$1.5 million. In April of this year, we increased the capacity of the MCL to meet increased demand. Up to half of amounts of the DHHS contracted crisis services can be accessed via cost settlement rather than fee for service.

In addition to Crisis Services, the OBH funds a 24/7 Intentional Warm Line staffed by people with lived experience of mental health challenges who are Certified in peer support. In May 2020, the OBH significantly expanded capacity of the Intentional Peer Warmline to accommodate increased demand during the COVID-19 pandemic. We also fund Peers and Recovery Coaches in Emergency Departments around the State to help connect people with supports and, at the beginning of the pandemic, launched the

StrengthenME program, providing over 40K sessions to date supporting mental health and resilience in response to COVID-19.

This Legislative session, there have been multiple bills and associated testimony asserting that the Department is not investing in mental health services. To put it in context with objective data, a 2017 study by Jaffe and Torrey<sup>1</sup> categorized Maine as the most generous of all states in terms of percentage of total State spending on mental health services, eight times more than the bottom ranked state, Arkansas. That figure is even prior to policy shifts under the current administration that have brought MaineCare rate increases and additional service investments.

We anticipate that with the roll out of the 3 digit 988 mental health crisis number next year we will successfully divert calls from 911 to our crisis line. OBH recently successfully secured a 988 planning grant and launched a Planning Coalition, including representation from DHHS, the Emergency Services Communication Bureau, the Department of Public Safety, Bureau of Veteran's Services, crisis providers, and others stakeholders to develop a comprehensive plan for ensuring this new, game changing resource is effectively integrated into a robust crisis system of care. We appreciate the component of LD 1586 that recognizes the importance of a public health campaign and intend to implement one to raise awareness of Maine's crisis services, including 988. A significant investment beyond the \$100K included in this bill will be necessary. While we have been praised at the national level for being ahead of many states due to our high answer rate for crisis calls and dedicated state funding for the MCL and mobile crisis, we are confident we can further improve Maine's Crisis Continuum of Care by adding crisis stabilization services around the state.

Finally, The Department's Comprehensive Rate System Reform includes examination of the way crisis services are reimbursed. We are thankful that the recent American Rescue Plan included an enhanced FMAP of 85% for mobile crisis as well as planning grants from the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services. The Department is actively exploring the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic model as one strategy for funding crisis services in line with the anticipated increased demand.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have and to make myself available for questions at the work session.

1. Jaffe, D.J. and Torrey, E.F. (2017). Funds for Treating Individuals with Mental Illness: Is Your State Generous or Stingy? A Report from Mental Illness Policy Org.