

MaineHealth

Testimony of Roslyn L Gerwin, DO

MaineHealth

In Opposition to LD 642,

“An Act to Ensure That Children Receive Behavioral Health Services”

Wednesday, March 24, 2021

MaineHealth Member Organizations:

Franklin Community Health Network

LincolnHealth

MaineHealth Care At Home

Maine Behavioral Healthcare

Memorial Hospital

Maine Medical Center

NorDx

Pen Bay Medical Center

Southern Maine Health Care

Synernet

Waldo County General Hospital

Western Maine Health

Part of the MaineHealth Family:

MaineHealth Accountable Care Organization

MaineHealth Affiliates:

MaineGeneral Health

Mid Coast-Parkview Health

New England Rehabilitation Hospital of Portland

St. Mary's Health System

Senator Carney, Representative Harnett and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, I am Dr. Roslyn Gerwin, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist at Maine Medical Center, and I am here to testify in strong opposition to LD 642, “An Act to Ensure That Children Receive Behavioral Health Services.”

MaineHealth is Maine’s largest integrated non-profit health care system that provides the full continuum of health care services to the residents of eleven counties in Maine and one in New Hampshire. As part of our mission of “Working Together So Maine’s Communities are the Healthiest in America,” MaineHealth, which includes Maine Behavioral Healthcare, is committed to creating a seamless system of behavioral healthcare across Maine, coordinating hospital psychiatric care with community-based treatment services, and better access to behavioral healthcare through integration with primary care services.

We have spoken with the sponsor, and while we share her goal of not delaying care to a patient regardless of medical diagnosis or age – and, furthermore, agree that increasing access to behavioral health services should be paramount for the 130th Legislature – we cannot support this bill as drafted. The bill before you today will create new ways in which care will ultimately be delayed, such as putting the conflict of parents ahead of the health and wellbeing of the child, or relying on dissenting parents being physically accessible or having the capacity to participate in a mediation process.

According to a [2019 JAMA Pediatrics article](#), Maine has the highest prevalence of children with at least one mental health disorder in the country. Moreover, suicide is the [second leading cause of death](#) among Mainers ages 15-34 years and the fourth leading cause of death among Maine youth ages 10-14 years. I have personally cared for an alarming rise in pediatric medically admitted suicide attempts at Barbara Bush Children’s Hospital, including a 7 year old child. Delays in accessing appropriate behavioral health service will only serve to further enable this health care crisis. I would also note that because MaineHealth integrates behavioral health care into primary care, this bill could have a widespread effect.

Lastly, I am concerned that this legislation will add to the stigma surrounding behavioral health by singling it out from other health care. Why should behavioral health care be treated any differently from asthma or diabetes? It’s hard to envision a scenario in which we would require parents to participate in mediation before a child could access an inhaler or insulin. With that said, I urge the Committee to vote Ought Not to Pass on LD 642, “An Act to Ensure That Children Receive Behavioral Health Services.”

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.