



Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine

The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers

Malory Otteson Shaughnessy, Executive Director

Testimony in Opposition to LD 1436

An Act To Protect Certain Essential Workers from Infectious Disease

Sponsored by Representative O'Connell on April 30, 2021

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Good morning Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing. I am Malory Shaughnessy, a resident of Westbrook, and the Executive Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services.

With 35 members across the state of Maine, the **Alliance** is the member organization for Maine's community based mental health and substance use treatment providers. Alliance members provide services to around 85,000 Maine men, women and children and employ close to 5,000 employees statewide. The **Alliance** advocates for the implementation of sound policies and evidence-based practices that serve to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our behavioral health care system.

Members of the Alliance can appreciate the sentiment that is behind this legislation, and have constantly worked to assure that workers on the front lines were protected while they worked with both children and adults providing mental health and substance use disorder services throughout this pandemic.

Unfortunately, many agencies struggled to keep personal protective equipment (PPE) in stock during the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially not considered "essential healthcare personnel" we had to advocate to get a declaration by the Governor to get this label and acquire needed supplies. Many agencies had staff or volunteers providing homemade masks and other PPE.

We would have real concerns with the listed items because agencies do not use all of these items. In most behavioral health care agencies "surgical masks" are sufficient. By being so specific, this legislation goes too far.

Another concern is around the requirement of a 3 month "stockpile" of equipment. Many agencies do not have the space to store 3 months of PPE at each location. Also, financially, our agencies do not have the capacity to stockpile PPE in preparation for a crisis. PPE expires and has to be constantly replaced in stockpiles, and none of this expense is reimbursed by MaineCare or other insurers. It would be devastating for agencies already trying to survive on stagnant rates.

Finally, we believe that establishing standards to ensure that Maine has a sufficient stock of PPE is a reasonable policy goal. We recommend that this bill be amended to direct the Maine Emergency Management Agency or Maine CDC be charged with accumulating a sufficient stockpile of PPE that can then be distributed to employers when they are in need. This is their role and responsibility, and would be much more cost effective and efficient.

Please vote LD 1436 Ought Not to Pass or direct the mandate to a centralized state agency.