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**LD 693, 'An Act To Make the Pilot Program Providing Mental Health Case Management Services to Veterans a Permanent Program'
Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs**

March 22, 2021

Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazza, and honorable members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee – my name is David Richmond, and I am the Director of the Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services. I am here today to testify in support of LD 693.

As Bureau Director, I have come before you on several occasions to discuss issues that directly effect the lives of Maine's veterans. One of the most urgent issues facing our veteran population is mental health care. Whether due to negative experiences or events that may have occurred while in service, or the current pandemic that has forced isolation for so many, mental health care is critically important to the lives of those who served, and the need for improved access to high quality care is vital.

On January 1, 2018 Maine hospitals began implementing a pilot program to identify veterans in need of mental and behavioral health care. The Department of Health and Human Services, in coordination with the Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services, entered into contracts with both EasterSeals Maine and Health Affiliates Maine in an effort to ensure a statewide network of case management is established, which provided coordinated mental health care services to Maine veterans. The pilot was deemed a success as veterans were presenting to emergency rooms across the state, and were then provided connection to case management at either Easterseals or HAM.

The pilot was open to all veterans, free of charge, no matter their discharge or length of service. The term "veteran" included:

1. Any person who has served in the United States Armed Forces (Active Duty, National Guard and Reserves) who needs mental health treatment or mental health navigation.
2. Any service member currently serving in the Armed Forces.

Both Easterseals Maine and Health Affiliates Maine were selected to serve as participating providers due to their history of working with service members, veterans and their families. These resources are tremendously valuable assets to our veteran population.

I thank you for taking the time to hear testimony on this important topic and would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

Respectfully,

David A. Richmond
Director, Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services