



Press Release

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Advocates Demand Investment in Mental Health and Substance Use Treatment and Recovery Supports

Augusta, Maine - The Behavioral Healthcare for Maine Coalition (BHC4Me), comprised of advocates, providers, law enforcement, legislators, people with lived experience, and those in recovery, came to Augusta today to demand that the legislature fully fund several bills that have passed with bi-partisan support to address the unraveling mental health care system and comprehensively respond to the state's opioid crisis.

Speakers highlighted the fact that the Legislature has passed many of these bills with veto proof votes in both the House and the Senate. They are now sitting with the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs awaiting the legislative resolve to fund them.

"We congratulate the legislative leaders who have worked tirelessly with us to pass a comprehensive package of bills that address critical needs in both mental health and substance use treatment and recovery in Maine. Now, as the saying goes, they need to put their money where their mouth is," according to Malory Shaughnessy, a member of the group and Executive Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, "It is time to allocate the state resources to shore up mental health care for our youth and stem the tide of opioid deaths we have seen rising these last few years. And truly, it is our money that should be going to commonsense measures that Mainers support."

The package of bills includes many to shore up the children's mental health system. Bills like LD 1868 to provide an increase in the reimbursement rate for evidence-based intensive outpatient psychosocial treatments for children. This will help clear waiting lists for these services, reducing the likelihood that the youth receiving them will end up in crisis.

There are bills such as LD 1517 to increase the MaineCare reimbursement rate to allow agencies to invest in their direct care Behavioral Health Professionals (BHPs) to assure facilities can retain a trained workforce to reduce the waitlists for these services. And LD 1879 to establish a loan repayment program for mental health professionals who will work in underserved areas of Maine.

One bill, LD 1737, would provide an increase in the MaineCare reimbursement rate to expand capacity and help eliminate the waitlist for medication management services. Medication Management is a behavioral health service that is critical to many thousands of Maine people with mental illness, trauma and co-occurring conditions such as addiction and intellectual and developmental disabilities. This service helps stabilize people and decrease the need for costly emergency department visits or the potential for incarceration.

There is also a package of bills to comprehensively address Opioid Use Disorder.

These bills, such as LD 1430, would build on the current system of evidence-based substance use treatment to provide integrated medication-assisted treatment to uninsured individuals with substance use disorders across Maine. The state's initial response in

creating Opioid Health Homes did not meet the acuity of need that someone newly in recovery faces. However, these Opioid Health Homes could fit into this more comprehensive system of “Hubs and Spokes” to give someone in long term recovery the treatment they need to get back to work and re-engage with their family and community.

“With a vision of a Maine-wide system of care through Hub and Spoke; and a compassionate entry point through safe clean needle syringe exchange I CAN see a healthier Maine on so many levels,” stated Representative Karen Vachon, “This is the way life should be. I hope the appropriations committee sees the value and funds these initiatives.”

Several of the recommendations from the Opioid Task Force are included in this package of bills to address stigma; treatment while incarcerated, access to housing, and prevention of infectious diseases. Assessment of need and appropriate allocation of resources could happen statewide through a new cabinet level council created with LD 105, and specific assessment and referral could happen within Maine’s correctional facilities through LD 966.

“There are funds available and now is the time to invest in these services,” added Simonne Maline, Executive Director of the Consumer Council of Maine, “Investment in recovery supports and treatment can make all the difference, not only in an individual’s life, but also in the life of their families and our communities.”

Additional Quotes from the Speakers:

“Maine is suffering from a shortage of young people, threatening the vitality of our workforce and economy. While we are doing cartwheels to attract young people from other states, we also need to focus on the young adults here at home. If we don’t act, Maine will continue to lose young people to suicide, incarceration and overdose,” said **Sen. Cathy Breen of Falmouth**. “Fortunately, research on the brain has progressed at rapid speeds and we know that with the right mental health care services, more young Mainers can fully participate in our communities and economy.”

“We must act. The loss of 418 lives to overdose death last year, 42 more than the year before, cannot stand. The harm done to Maine’s children, families, and our workforce by our failure to expand MaineCare and our failure to preserve essential programs and services cannot stand. We’re better than this. We know what we need to do. It’s time to stop blaming our most vulnerable people, time to stop making excuses and setting up false choices. As a legislator, I know we have the ability and the responsibility to act. We know what we need to do; we can overcome the roadblocks put in front of us. It’s time to act - time to get it done. Maine people deserve no less.” **State Representative Jay McCreight**.

“We must fund services if we are to see the tide turn and save our communities from the devastating impact of the opioid epidemic, and other addiction. Without intervention, and treatment and recovery, generations of families are impacted and our entire society pays a terrible price.” **Portland Recovery Community Center Director Leslie Clark**.

“Investing in a robust and effective recovery-oriented system of care provides opportunities for the people who will recover, and it provides hope for their communities to recover as well.” **Jesse Harvey, Young People in Recovery**.

“Our mental health system in Maine is extremely fractured. We support funding which will provide services to children in need of critical mental health services. The Maine Chapter of NASW not only supports Maine Care expansion which will provide health care coverage for 60,000 Mainers, further, we support an increase for Maine Care reimbursement rates so that providers are able to adequately provide these necessary services to those most in need”. **Lori Gramlich, Executive Director, NASW Maine**

"This package of bills is a good, but a minimal start to addressing the challenges in our mental health system. People with mental health issues and addiction challenges need resources. Key to all of this is a workforce that is paid adequately to do this important work. Yes, it will cost money. We applaud the legislature for passing this package of bills, but now they must fund them. If necessary, use funds from the very substantial Rainy Day fund. For people with mental health challenges and their families, it is not only raining - it is the 100 year flood".

Betsy Sweet, on behalf of the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative.

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