

Testimony for the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and the Health and Human Services Committee; February 21, 2023



Regarding LD 258: An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025

Good afternoon Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Health and Human Services Committees. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Eric Meyer; I am CEO of Spurwink Services. I am here to speak in support of LD258. At Spurwink, we provide behavioral health and educational services to children, adults, and families across Maine. Last year, we served over 8,100 Maine people affected by trauma, mental health challenges, substance use disorders, developmental disabilities and autism, so they can live healthy, engaged lives *in their communities*. The children's behavioral health funding in LD258 is critical to ensure that that vision is realized.

I am very pleased to report that the proposed funding in LD258 for children's behavioral health will make a significant difference for services that Maine children and families depend on. Today I'm asking you to support this bill.

Many of you know me and have heard me speak about the desperate need for increased funding for children's behavioral health services. I am deeply grateful and appreciative that over the last few years in particular the legislature, Governor Mills and our colleagues at DHHS have enabled significant funding that was a good start in remedying a decade of underfunding of these services. This proposed budget will allow providers to stabilize services and in many cases expand access to care. Increasing service availability is critical because the need in Maine has never been greater.

1 in 4 children in Maine has at least one mental health disorder, like depression, anxiety, or ADHD, according to a 2019 study in JAMA Pediatric. In fact, the study found the highest percentage of children's mental health problems in the U.S. is among Maine children. Since the pandemic, rates of anxiety, depression and substance use disorders among Maine children have only increased. Even as we speak, Maine children sit in emergency rooms, hospital beds, are homeless or are in out of state residential facilities.

Every day, I see messages at Spurwink from desperate parents seeking help for their children. They are asking for a care coordinator, a counselor, a psychiatrist, a specialized education program or intensive residential services. We always do our best to help, but too often there is a lengthy wait for services.

The funding in this budget will allow us to expand services and increase urgently needed access to care. There are still gaps we need to address, such as the profound shortage of clinicians, but this is an excellent start. As director Probert of MaineCare stated recently to the HHS Committee, the **rate increases resulting from the new rate analysis for many of the behavioral health services are simply "setting a new baseline," but it is not fixing the whole system.**

The children we serve and the system to support them is in crisis. The children of Maine need your help, and the system that supports them needs your help. Thank you for considering these important issues and please support LD258.