



Maine Behavioral Healthcare

MaineHealth

**Testimony of Mary Jane Krebs, Senior Vice President, Maine Behavioral
Healthcare, President Spring Harbor Hospital
In Support of LD 1470
“Resolve, Regarding Reimbursement for Providing Inpatient Care to
Individuals with Acute Mental Health Care Needs”
April 27, 2021**

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Mary Jane Krebs, of Maine Behavioral Healthcare, and I am here to testify in strong support of this bill.

As a lifelong nurse and behavioral health professional, I have witnessed the impact of stigma on healthcare services that treat people with behavioral health diagnoses. That stigma manifests in a payment system that treats behavioral health services as second class to somatic health care services. Society invests in those things that it values, and behavioral health care is clearly not high on our collective priority lists.

However, early on in its development as a health system, MaineHealth recognized the critical connection between mental and physical health and made significant investments in building a strong system of behavioral health services to help meet the needs of our communities. The most recent investment is \$11.1 million in capital investment for the specialized psychiatric emergency department and inpatient units in Sanford. That investment provided us with the capital to build a beautiful, state of the art space that rivals any inpatient unit in the state.

The units are specifically designed to support recovery from acute episodes of mental illness. The atmosphere is calming. There is a garden to ensure that patients can access the healing power of fresh air. A special low stimulation room is state of the art in providing a therapeutic environment. And the psychiatric emergency department ensures that patients experiencing behavioral health crises are properly supported and evaluated by mental health professionals.

Though the pandemic has exacerbated the behavioral health needs of our patients, these services are already making a difference in relieving pressure in our EDs, and particularly as the volume and acuity of patients has increased significantly. With an average census of approximately 25, we have already doubled inpatient psychiatric bed capacity in York County. With appropriate support, we expect to have both units fully operational by fall.

Like anyone with a chronic illness, individuals with behavioral health diagnoses rely upon a continuum of services to meet their needs at different points in time. We have testified before you numerous times this Session about the importance of community-based services that are needed to help individuals when they are more stable and able to live safely in the community. But just as there are times when individuals with severe hypertension wind up in the hospital,

there are also times when individuals with mental illness need hospitalization to be safe. These units provide that important resource for southern Maine for patients with high levels of acuity.

MaineHealth stepped up to invest in these behavioral health services in much the same way that it has for somatic health care services in each region that it serves. And it did so with the agreement that the State would do its part to cover the cost of care for its covered patients in need of care in these units.

I hope that you will support this bill to ensure that we can maintain these services going forward.