

MaineHealth

MaineHealth Local Health Systems

Franklin Community
Health Network
LincolnHealth
MaineHealth Care At Home
Maine Behavioral Healthcare
Memorial Hospital
Maine Medical Center
Mid Coast-Parkview Health
NorDx
Pen Bay Medical Center
Southern Maine Health Care
Waldo County General Hospital
Western Maine Health

Part of the MaineHealth Family

MaineHealth Accountable
Care Organization

MaineHealth Affiliates

MaineGeneral Health
New England Rehabilitation
Hospital of Portland
St. Mary's Health System

Testimony of Katie Fullam Harris MaineHealth Regarding LD 221 The Governor's Proposed Change Package Before the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations & Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services May 20, 2021

Senator Breen, Representative Pierce, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees of Appropriations and Financial Services, I am Katie Fullam Harris of MaineHealth, and I am here to testify on several budget items, including those that are priority areas but are not included in the Governor's proposed change package.

MaineHealth is Maine's largest integrated non-profit health care system that provides a full continuum of health care services to the residents of eleven counties in Maine and one in New Hampshire. Our scope of services range from primary and specialty physician services to a continuum of behavioral health care services, community and tertiary hospital care, home health care and a lab.

The Governor's proposed change package includes important investments that are aligned with some of our priorities, but it also fails to address other key gaps in behavioral health and workforce development that are instrumental to supporting a vision for a healthy Maine.

We appreciate that the Governor's proposed change package includes support for hospitals – support that is much needed as we face difficult budgets due to the pandemic. MaineHealth projects that the pandemic will result in a net unfavorable impact to our system of over \$100 million. The funds allocated in the Change Package will help, and particularly for our rural hospitals that were already struggling financially prior to the pandemic.

In addition, we also strongly support the following provisions included in the proposed change package:

- Increased support for IOP for substance use treatment;
- Support for the MOM program to address pregnant women with substance use needs;
- Inclusion of the National Diabetes Prevention Program;
- Funding for the Early Psychosis program; and,
- Support for an IOP program for people with mental illness.

These items are important, and particularly as we identify ways to improve the continuum of behavioral health services in Maine.

But just as the change package includes several important priorities, it also fails to include others. Last fall, MaineHealth identified three key policy priorities to help us meet our mission and vision for the system:

1. Stabilize and improve Maine's behavioral health system
2. Address the serious workforce shortages facing our State
3. Address regulatory barriers to meeting our vision

To stabilize the state's behavioral health system, and in addition to the increase rates for substance use treatment, we identified the need to support inpatient psychiatric beds in Sanford and a broad array of community mental health services that serve as the foundation for people with mental health needs.

Specifically, MaineHealth invested in 40 new psychiatric inpatient beds on the Goodall Hospital campus in Sanford. These beds replace the 12 bed unit that previously existed on the Biddeford campus, expanding capacity and providing state of the art and destigmatizing inpatient treatment capacity for York and Cumberland Counties.

These beds were developed with the Department's promise that it would support an enhanced reimbursement rate that reflects the actual cost of providing care to patients who receive treatment in the new units. That promise has not been fulfilled, causing challenges as we try to pay the additional staffing costs needed to open additional beds. Sponsored by Rep. Meyer and unanimously supported by the Health and Human Services Committee, LD 1470 would require the Department to live up to its previous agreement and fund the new beds.

In addition to LD 1470, there are a number of bills pending that address important aspects of the continuum of community-based mental health services. These include:

- Outpatient psychiatry (LD 1147, Rep. Colleen Madigan)
- ACT Services (LD 582, Rep. Colleen Madigan)
- Outpatient Therapy (LD 496, Rep. Lori Gramlich)

All of these services are starved by the State's failure to update the rates in over a decade. In fact, a number of providers have been forced to discontinue services, and particularly in medication management and ACT. Yesterday, Maine Behavioral Healthcare had 1216 patients who have been referred for community services over the last three months but not yet seen by a provider.

A recent Statewide Quality Improvement Council meeting held for consumers highlighted their own frustration in trying to access community services, causing people with mental illness to get stuck in emergency departments and inpatient beds awaiting discharge to community services.

Access is severely limited to these services, with wait times of six months or a more in many cases. In addition to substance use treatment, these services are critical to maintaining a functioning community-based behavioral health system for Maine. We share the Department's vision to move towards incentivizing high value care through its payment structure, and we believe that a strong and stable behavioral health care system is necessary to achieve that goal. We strongly urge your support in increasing payments for community behavioral health services into the budget.

Workforce

The State's workforce shortage is having a significant impact on hospitals and other health care providers. Yesterday, we had 471 nursing vacancies and we are currently trying to recruit 65 physicians. As Maine's largest healthcare system, we seek innovative ways to address this shortage, some of which involve collaborating with other institutions.

For example, MaineHealth has partnered with all 15 nursing programs in the state to help our own employees grow in their careers. We support entry-level employees' enrollments in nursing programs, and the progressive development of our nurses who wish to advance their education and careers by pursuing a master's or doctoral degrees. We have expanded our clinical placement slots by 400 to accommodate students who need to complete their clinicals, and we have invested in clinical faculty to expand capacity at the schools. In addition, we partner with community organizations such as Jobs for Maine's Graduates and the Immigrant Welcome Center to ensure that young people and those new to Maine have the necessary tools to pursue careers in healthcare. Finally, our unique partnership with the Tufts School of Medicine supports the development of a strong physician workforce for Maine's future.

It is clear that increased investments in public/private solutions are needed to meet our growing workforce demands. Our ability to provide access to the high quality care for which Maine is recognized will be seriously impacted if we do not take immediate and bold steps to meet the need. Thus we support the Community College System's plans to increase the number of nurse graduates through an expansion of its licensed-based programs as unanimously supported by the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, and as detailed in the Community College System's Budget Priorities document.

Reductions in Payment

The Change Package maintains the cuts to the 340b program that were originally included in the Governor's proposed budget. The 340b program is a highly successful method of supplementing payments to hospitals that serve low-income populations. We estimate that the proposed budget reduction would result in a \$2.6 million loss, a reduction that our system can ill-afford, particularly during these challenging financial times.

Conclusion

In summary, Maine's hospitals and health systems have provided the backbone of our successful pandemic response over the last 15 months. We were instrumental in testing for Covid-19. We continue to care for patients who contract Covid-19. And our care teams supported an unprecedented vaccination infrastructure that has been instrumental in achieving our status as the most vaccinated state in the country. We have a lot of which to be proud.

At the same time, we have maintained our commitment to providing high quality care to our communities. In fact, all five eligible MaineHealth hospitals recently received a Leapfrog A quality and safety rating. And the [Lown Institute](#) recently ranked Maine Medical Center as the 6th best hospital in the country for appropriate utilization of health care. As we consider those areas in which greater investment is needed to sustain the health of Maine's population, behavioral health and workforce shortages clearly leap to the top.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I will be available to answer questions.