

TESTIMONY before the Committees on Appropriations and Health and Human Services

Regarding p. A-285 of LD 1001
State Budget

March 5, 2019

Senators Breen and Gratwick, Representatives Gattine and Hymanson, and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Health and Human Services Committees: thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Travis Kennedy. I'm the Director of Public Affairs for Cumberland County government. I'm here to speak on behalf of the county in support of Part A-285 in the Governor's budget, which would support increasing MaineCare reimbursement for Medically Assisted Treatment.

Cumberland County is home to roughly 293,000 full-time residents, and has suffered dramatically from the scourge of opiate misuse in recent years.

Through the collaborative efforts of our sheriff's department, county jail, and at least a half dozen public and private entities from a range of fields including health, housing, counseling, and employment we have developed a partnership that seeks to respond to this crisis from all

angles, in particular for constituents suffering from substance use disorder who pass through the county jail.

There are three facilities in Cumberland County that accept Medicaid reimbursement for Medically Assisted Treatment, or MAT. We support Governor Mills's effort to increase state reimbursement for MAT in the state budget.

To be sure, MAT is not the ultimate solution to substance misuse treatment. It is a piece of a much larger puzzle that works across multiple silos including intensive counseling, access to health care, enhanced law enforcement, sober housing, preventive education, pain management reform, grief and trauma recovery support, childhood development and protective services, and economic opportunity, among others. I was happy to hear the commissioner in her testimony make clear that this funding increase will be part of a broader comprehensive approach. MAT is only one piece of this complex array of needs; but if we're going to spend money on it, we certainly should be spending enough for it to be effective.

Because the statistics are clear; when reimbursement rates are too low, and facilities aren't able to offer enough focus per-patient to keep them on the path to recovery the success rates of treatment drop. Not only is this a tragic

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cycle for patients and their families who are struggling with substance misuse; but it also takes otherwise capable employees out of the workforce, adds pressure on law enforcement, and increases the likelihood that these patients will cycle through the criminal justice system, through incarceration and through emergency room care. Underfunding MAT does not make this problem go away - it only pushes it toward more expensive societal costs.

Thank you for your time today, and for your consideration of this very important issue. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.