

MAINE ASSOCIATION OF PSYCHIATRIC PHYSICIANS

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May 12, 2005

Chairman Pingree, Chairman Mayo and Honorable Members of the
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: LD 151 "An Act To Improve the Delivery of Maine's Mental Health Services"

Dear Health and Human Services Committee Members,

I am writing you on behalf of the Maine Association of Psychiatric Physicians, formerly known as the Maine Psychiatric Association, to express our appreciation for Senator Nutting's proposal and your consideration of LD 151, An Act To Improve the Delivery of Maine's Mental Health Services. Senator Nutting and Health and Human Services Committee members are to be commended for their attention to the important issues that this bill raises. Thank you for allowing two of our members to participate in the working group chartered by your Committee.

While Maine serves many who are suffering from severe and persistent mental illness, we lack a means of helping those most in need who refuse treatment that is likely to be effective and who subsequently pose a significant risk to themselves and others. As physicians we recognize that the right of our patients to give or refuse consent is fundamental to medical care, but there are exceptional circumstances in which involuntary treatment is in the best interests both of the patient and the community. While we recognize our system could benefit from increasing the availability of current services, that alone would not be a solution to this particular problem. We do need another process, and LD 151 as amended by the majority recommendation of the working group is offering just that.

The majority recommendation for LD 151 has been substantially improved the bill over the past several weeks. Careful consideration of the experience in other states has helped to develop an evidence-based approach to Assisted Outpatient Treatment that would be very specific, respectful of the rights of Maine's patients, and effective in reducing some of the risk of harm associated with untreated serious and persistent mental illness.

We believe that the process proposed in the majority recommendation for LD 151 would be an important addition to treatment for certain patients in Maine and would help to reduce some of the tragic consequences of untreated serious and persistent mental illness in Maine's communities. We ask that you give this legislation your support.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the facilitation, encouragement and stamina that Brenda Harvey and Dianna Scully brought to the meeting week after week. It was also exceptionally helpful to have members of HHS participating in this working group, and we greatly appreciated the contributions made by Representative Sally Lewin, Representative Rick Burns, and of course Senator John Nutting, sponsor of this legislation.

Please contact us if you have any questions regarding LD 151 or related issues.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Edward Pontius, MD
Chair, Governmental and Legislative Affairs Committee
Maine Association of Psychiatric Physicians