



June 30, 2020

Statewide Consumer Council

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Good afternoon Senator Breen and Representative Gattine and esteemed members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee.

My name is Simonne Maline and I am the Executive Director of the Consumer Council System of Maine (CCSM).

The Consumer Council System of Maine (CCSM) is a public instrumentality written into state statute by the Maine Legislature to serve in an advisory capacity and to provide legislators, State Government and other relevant parties with guidance and advice regarding the delivery of effective and appropriate adult mental health services from those served by them.

I hope one thing that can come out of everyone's experiences during the pandemic is to talk about the need to further understand and practice trauma informed services/care. The world is now experiencing trauma as we never have before. I feel the need to say that first.

Secondly, let us talk about disparities... they are strong disparities in physical and mental health care for people living with disabilities as well as ethnic and racial disparities. This has affected people in that they are at a higher risk of getting covid-19 as well as the negative health outcomes from contracting it. In the mental health world, we know from research that those with significant mental health challenges die 25 years sooner than the general public, for a variety of reasons. Those same things are reasons that people that are in marginalized communities are at a much higher risk that the general public for Covid-19.

Since I was asked to speak today, I have reached out to fellow peers to share experiences with the service system.



Granted, many cannot share if they lack access to technology, which is probably the biggest barrier. I have also included one person's story to my testimony, who does not currently have access to Zoom because her computer died so she wrote her experience for me to share.

Here are some of the things they have told us, and we have also heard from our daily work with peers across the State.

As previously said, there is a technology barrier for so many people who need support. There are several facets to this. One is the funds to have anything like a smart phone, tablet, or computer. The second is that the internet to run these devices are often cost prohibitive to people who are on fixed and low incomes. Often in rural areas internet services are unavailable. There is also a great need to teach people who are not tech savvy with how to use programs like Zoom.

There is a wide variety of responses from people about services. Some service providers completely shut down. Some have offered a limited service option. Some are slowly re-opening. There is a wide variety of these options depending on who the provider is and where they are located.

Most are offering some form of telehealth. What I will say is MaineCare officials have been clear that offering video calls is not a preference but should be a priority. Many providers are only offering phone calls. While this is better than nothing, we think more work must go into making sure providers are offering video sessions first and foremost.

We are concerned about peers who are in residential settings as we have heard people have not had PPE available and people are not able to get out to attend essential appointments.

Two things that are going well are the Intentional Warm Line which has received a temporary increase through OBH to increase staff to three people 24/7. This is set to expire at the end of September. Also, people have spoken highly of the Clubhouses and their calling and zooming with members several times a day!

Thank you,

Simonne M Maline
