



**Testimony of Melissa Gattine, MA, LCPC
Senior Program Manager and Zero Suicide Project Director
in Support of
LD 2108 “An Act to Establish the Suicide Mortality Review Panel”
February 4, 2026**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Melissa Gattine, and I am here on behalf of MaineHealth to testify in support of LD 2108, “An Act to Establish the Suicide Mortality Review Panel.”

MaineHealth is an integrated non-profit health care system that provides the full continuum of health care services to the residents of eleven counties in Maine and one in New Hampshire. As part of our vision of “Working Together So Maine’s Communities are the Healthiest in America,” MaineHealth, which includes MaineHealth Behavioral Health, is committed to creating a seamless system of behavioral healthcare across Maine, coordinating hospital psychiatric care with community-based treatment services, and providing better access to behavioral healthcare through integration with primary care.

I am the Project Director of a federally funded Zero Suicide initiative. Zero Suicide is an evidence-based framework for community and hospital systems responding to suicidal patients. It has been demonstrated to significantly reduce suicide deaths and attempts in the communities where it is implemented. There are effective treatments for suicidal thoughts and behaviors. The Zero Suicide grant is allowing us to increase our care team’s capacity to identify and engage patients at risk of suicide and provide them with that care.

A common myth is that only people who have a mental illness think about, attempt or die by suicide. This leads to the assumption that if we get better at identifying and treating mental illness, we will make a significant impact on suicide rates. While this is an important part of the picture, it is not the whole story. According to the Suicide Prevention Resource Center only one-third of suicide decedents had a depressed mood at the time of their death, and less than half had a current mental health problem. If we only look at the deaths of individuals who had a mental illness or were in treatment at the time of their suicide, we are missing more than half the story.

We need to broaden our focus, beyond only people who are diagnosed with mental illness and/or receiving treatment. We need to ensure we are investigating and learning from all suicide deaths. Suicide deaths that occur for someone served by a hospital or licensed agency are reviewed by organizational leadership, with the intent of identifying areas of improvement. This is a regulatory requirement. The outcomes of these reviews live in discreet silos, within the organizations. Furthermore, most organizations do not have the capacity to aggregate their own data, so knowledge gained from these reviews has extremely limited impact. With the assistance of a federal grant, MaineHealth is just now starting to look at the larger picture of trends in suicide deaths. But we are only one organization who looks only at people served by our

programs. A statewide Suicide Mortality Review Board will bring together information from across the state, including those that happened when there was no active medical or mental health treatment.

One of the known risk factors for suicide attempts and deaths is having a connection to someone who has died by suicide. According to the CDC, for every suicide death there are approximately 135 people exposed, meaning they have a connection personally, professionally, or emotionally to the person who died. Additionally, for each suicide there are typically six survivors, people for whom the person who died was a close family or friend and the death has a devastating impact. Both people exposed and survivors are at varying degrees of increased risk of dying by suicide. Putting this into Maine figures, with 274 suicide deaths in 2023, there were 36,990 exposures, and 1,644 survivors. Every year, the number of people at risk in our state grows exponentially.

Suicide is a complex problem, and no single initiative is going to shift the tide. The development of a statewide Suicide Mortality Review Board is a crucial step in identifying the network of solutions needed to reverse the current trajectory in suicide deaths. We need to support decision making with meaningful information about why people are dying by suicide in our state.

Thank you for your consideration and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.