

STATE OF MAINE

—
IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD
TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-SIX

—
S.P. 862 - L.D. 2144

Resolve, to Establish the Working Group to Prioritize Wellness and Mental Health Resources for Heritage Industries

Preamble. **Whereas**, struggles with mental health and wellness are common within Maine's heritage industries, with many individuals and family members reporting high levels of stress, burnout, depression and anxiety; and

Whereas, a July 2025 survey conducted by the University of Maine Cooperative Extension and partners revealed 61% of respondents from the agriculture, aquaculture and wild harvest fisheries industries identified the need for increased public education to raise awareness and reduce stigma around mental health issues and access to industry-specific and culturally competent supportive services; and

Whereas, Vermont, Colorado, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and other states have recognized this critical need and implemented solutions; and

Whereas, Maine held its first Maine Land and Sea Farmer Wellness Forum in September 2025, at which over 200 people were in attendance; and

Whereas, the 2021 suicide rate among persons of working age in the United States is approximately 33% higher than it was 2 decades ago, with the agriculture, forestry, logging and fishing industries remaining among occupation groups with higher suicide rates; and

Whereas, the purpose of the working group under this legislation is to convene a group of leaders and experts in heritage industries and mental health and wellness care and wellness programs to improve access to mental health and wellness and wellness care for those involved in agriculture, fisheries, forestry and logging and their families; now, therefore, be it

Sec. 1. Working group established. Resolved: That the Working Group to Prioritize Wellness and Mental Health Resources for Heritage Industries, referred to in this resolve as "the working group," is established.

Sec. 2. Working group membership. Resolved: That the working group consists of 11 members as follows:

1. The Commissioner of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, or the commissioner's designee, who serves as a cochair of the working group;
2. The Commissioner of Marine Resources, or the commissioner's designee, who serves as a cochair of the working group;
3. The Commissioner of Health and Human Services, or the commissioner's designee, who serves as a cochair of the working group;
4. One member representing the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, appointed by the cochairs of the working group;
5. One member representing the State's agriculture industry, appointed by the cochairs of the working group;
6. One member representing the State's fishing industry, appointed by the cochairs of the working group;
7. One member representing the State's logging sector, appointed by the cochairs of the working group;
8. One member representing a statewide mental health services provider organization, appointed by the cochairs of the working group;
9. One member representing an occupational health and safety organization, appointed by the cochairs of the working group;
10. One member with expertise in rural health or public health services, appointed by the cochairs of the working group; and
11. One member representing a statewide organization that delivers community services, appointed by the cochairs of the working group.

Sec. 3. Duties. Resolved: That the working group shall:

1. Review existing mental health, primary care and wellness resources available to individuals in the State's heritage industries, including agriculture, fishing, forestry and logging;
2. Consider the specific challenges for individuals with serious brain disorders and traumatic brain injuries working in heritage industries;
3. Identify gaps in the provision of services and barriers to accessing existing resources;
4. Identify issues facing migrant workers;
5. Examine successful models from other states and jurisdictions;
6. Develop recommendations for establishing sustainable funding mechanisms and service delivery models; and
7. Explore opportunities for public education to reduce stigma around mental health issues and increase awareness of mental health services.

Sec. 4. Report. Resolved: That, no later than December 1, 2026, the working group shall submit a report that includes its findings and recommendations based on its review under section 3, including suggested legislation, for presentation to the joint standing committees of the Legislature having jurisdiction over agriculture, conservation and

forestry matters, marine resources matters and health and human services matters. The joint standing committees may each submit legislation based on the findings and recommendations in the report to the 133rd Legislature in 2027.