

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry and members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee, my name is Jeffrey Barkin. I'm a psychiatric physician practicing here in Maine and the immediate past president at the Maine Medical Association . I urge you to vote "out to pass" on LD 224. Here are my comments.

One of us received a call from a physician colleague about his wife, Amy, who had just given birth and developed a severe postpartum depression after the delivery of a healthy daughter. The physician, willing to drive anywhere in Maine, emailed psychiatrists, eager to have his wife seen for disabling depression. Rather than being discharged home to bond with her newborn, she stayed in the hospital as there was no psychiatrist taking new patients within a six hour drive.

Children and adolescents experiencing mental health crises are languishing in emergency rooms throughout Maine, again because of lack of access to psychiatric physicians and other mental health professionals to safely discharge them to. Our hospitals are filled with patients with severe mental health struggles, unable to be safely discharged, but taking up critically needed hospital beds. At Maine Medical Center, there are 40 patients unable to be discharged, many of whom have psychosocial obstacles. And every time a hospital bed is filled, it is not available should any of us become ill or injured. Were this not bad enough, diagnoses of mental health disorders have increased profoundly throughout CoVid. Diagnoses of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicide have risen 40 % in a short period of time. Indeed, screening all children for anxiety is now a screening recommended by the CDC. The 13 % increase in suicide in teenage girls is terrifying, with too many brilliant and hopeful lives lost needlessly.

How did we get here and what can we do now? There are simple and easy steps we can take to address our mental health crisis in Maine, the least of which is to pass LD 224, "An Act to Strengthen Maine's Healthcare Workforce by Preventing Discrimination by Requiring Maintenance of Certification for Insurance Reimbursement." As it stands, physicians are required to recertify in their specialty by taking an examination every ten years and completing mandatory classes; all of this is redundant from the other requirements we must adhere to. While we strongly believe that physicians must always be competent, safe, and up to date to practice medicine, we already have license requirements for ongoing continuing medical education for each and every license cycle. This means physicians must spend – separate from board recertification – upwards of 100 hours each and every year or two to maintain our licenses in each state they are licensed. In addition, we must become board certified in our specialty, which we do after years of education as a junior physician. In fact, every physician already has 12-15 years of additional education after graduating from high school. We are steeped in science and medicine for all of our 20s and some of our 30s. To graduate medical school and residency requires more tests than one can even imagine. It is safe to say that we are well trained and "show our awesome" every year or two when we renew our licenses. And yet, in addition to all of this, we are asked to recertify and take a massive and expensive test every 10 years. A test which does not correlate with clinical skills whatsoever, with a pass rate so high as to render it useless. The only benefit is to the organizations which make the tests, who's executives make obscene amounts of money by essentially building a toll bridge in our driveways every 10 years. Out of state, Maine doesn't see a penny of this returned in taxes by these companies.

This is a blatant example of overreach and bizarre control gone amuck. Maine is the oldest state and one of the most rural and our physicians are similarly aging. They are leaving practice, with half of the

psychiatric workforce retiring these past few years and many more set to do so. And why are so many of us leaving practice? This predatory maintenance of certification is top on the list of reasons, compelling many highly experienced and wise physicians to leave the workforce at a time they are needed most. LD 224 would eliminate this redundant over burdensome regulation, one that benefits businesses and people who do not live in Maine. It burdens your physicians, who should instead be taking care of you, our patients, not spending hours each day and thousands each year for unneeded testing. Let us go back to taking care of the Amy's amongst us who need our services more than ever.

Thank you.