



Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine
The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers

Malory Otteson Shaughnessy, Executive Director

Testimony in Support of LD 632
An Act to Amend the Social Work Education Loan Repayment Program

Sponsored by Representative Crafts
3/14/2023

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Good afternoon Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business. I am Jennifer Christian, a resident of Dresden, and here on behalf of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services. The Alliance is the statewide association representing the majority of Maine's safety net community-based mental health and substance use treatment providers. The Alliance advocates for the implementation of sound policies and evidence-based practices that serve to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our behavioral health care system.

On behalf of the Alliance, I am here to speak in support of LD 632, "An Act to Amend the Social Work Education Loan Repayment Program." Maine is in the middle of a serious mental health crisis. Maine people struggling with mental health issues are currently facing 7-month waitlists for outpatient treatment, the ineffective and expensive use of emergency rooms for months at a time waiting for residential treatment, and young people being sent out of state for care, all while the agencies that provide these much-needed services are being forced to eliminate programming due to workforce shortages.

Additionally, according to Maine's child welfare ombudsman, "...there is a need for an increase in mental health and substance use services for adults and children in Maine. Lack of services can strongly affect the safety of children." <http://cwombudsman.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2022-Annual-Report-Maine-Child-Welfare-Ombudsman.pdf>

Clearly, Maine needs more social workers. LD 632 aims to improve and fund loan forgiveness for social workers. We need to be creating pathways to recruit students into these fields of study and to lure credentialed social workers to move to and practice in Maine. Funding the program is not a direct elimination of social work debt. Instead, it is an incentive to a group of highly trained and skilled professionals who care for our most vulnerable populations. I ask that you vote ought to pass on LD 632 and further consider others within the behavioral health field we might include in subsequent sessions.

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions you have for me.