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Committee on Health and Human Services
Maine House of Representatives

April 4, 2023

Dear Honorable Committee Members,

I am submitting testimony in support of LD1304: Resolve, to Establish the Task Force to Study Barriers to Achieving Behavioral Health Integration and Parity. I am a psychologist in private practice in Portland and have served in multiple leadership roles within the Maine Psychological Association (MePA) including President from 2020-2022 and Chair of the Financial Oversight Committee. These experiences have given me unique insight into difficulties with parity that behavioral health providers face and I believe that this task force is an important step towards greater parity.

Difficulties with the lack of parity between medical health and behavioral health have gone back decades and many of these have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic. The American Psychological Association has repeatedly stated that the behavioral health consequences of the pandemic will long outlast the medical health risks. As you are, no doubt, aware these consequences are seen in our schools, homes, and workplaces. Both teachers and students report record high experiences with stress and mood difficulties at school. Adults have found it increasingly difficult to manage professional, personal, and family needs. Substance use continues to be a significant concern and Maine saw a record number of overdose deaths in 2021.

Meanwhile access to care has become increasingly scarce. I currently have approximately 20 prospective clients on my waitlist and many people I speak with tell me that their phone calls and emails to prospective providers go unanswered. Within my roles at MePA I have worked with providers who have gone months without receiving payment from insurers (including cases where tens of thousands of dollars were owed), with providers who have received illogical denial of pre-authorizations of services, and with providers who are unable to speak with a knowledgeable provider services representative. As a psychologist I have lost clients who were unable to continue in treatment due to an insurance change and have individuals in need of treatment unable to initiate treatment because I was not in-network with their insurance carrier.

While the acute need for services is not limited to behavioral health, I believe that the obstacles to health access are. Many Maine insurance providers have such limited provider panels they are, in effect, discriminating against Mainers seeking behavioral

health support. This limitation is in no small part to insurance providers (including Mainecare) requiring unique billing and credentialing carve-outs to behavioral health providers. Additionally, delayed, inconsistent, and insufficient payments from insurance providers are forcing more and more Maine psychologist to go out of network. It is my hope that this legislation will broaden access to behavioral health service, better integrate patient care, and reduce overall costs to the system.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas Cooper". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Thomas Cooper, Psy.D.
Psychologist