



**LD 1506 Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services to
Study the Scarcity of Licensed Clinical Behavioral Health
Professionals Across the State**

**Testimony in Support
April 25, 2023**

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry and members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee, my name Lisa Harvey-McPherson RN. I am here providing testimony on behalf of Northern Light Health and our member organizations in support of this bill. Northern Light Health member organizations include 10 hospitals located in southern, central, eastern and northern Maine, 8 nursing facilities, air and ground ambulance, behavioral health, addiction treatment, pharmacy, primary and specialty care practices and a state-wide home care and hospice program. Ninety three percent of Maine's population lives in the Northern Light Health service area. Northern Light Health is also proud to be one of Maine's largest employers with more than 10,000 employees statewide.

I have had the honor of working on nursing workforce legislation for the past 20 years and came to learn early on in this work the critical need to forecast current and future supply and demand trends. The dynamic of the nursing workforce applies to all Maine's health care workforce as the oldest state in the nation, our workers are generally older than workers in other states. This means that our retirement cliffs tend to have more significant impact as a large number of workers leave employment at similar periods of time. Knowing the number of workers needed now and projecting the timeline when workers will leave the workforce is critically important. This allows us to determine what capacity we need to build into our health professions education programs to increase the number of graduates.

In 2017 the Maine Nursing Action Coalition projected that Maine would have a shortage of 3200 RNs by 2025. This was a call to action for our nursing education programs hospitals and health care settings to work together to increase the number of new nurse graduates annually. We were successful, between 2017 and 2021, 1000 new nurses entered the workforce with an average age less than 35. Infusing this number of younger nurses into the workforce has reduced the projected shortage to 2,250 RNs by 2025. Still a large number but we have had positive impact and our work to increase student capacity continues.

I emphasize the nursing experience in my testimony today to demonstrate why this bill is so important. We know we have a shortage of behavioral health professionals; patients are waiting for many months to receive services and the most acute adults and children are "living in our hospital emergency departments". Increasing capacity requires that we know how many behavioral health professionals we need today, how many we need to add to the workforce over the next 10 years, what our educational capacity is and how many more graduates are needed. This bill provides the framework

Northern Light Health
Government Relations
43 Whiting Hill Road
Brewer, Maine 04412

Office 207.861.3282
Fax 207.861.3044

Northern Light Health

Acadia Hospital
A.R. Gould Hospital
Beacon Health
Blue Hill Hospital
C.A. Dean Hospital
Eastern Maine Medical Center
Home Care & Hospice
Inland Hospital
Maine Coast Hospital
Mayo Hospital
Mercy Hospital
Northern Light Health Foundation
Northern Light Laboratory
Northern Light Pharmacy
Sebasticook Valley Hospital

needed create a data driven approach to address the behavioral health access challenges and serve the people of Maine.

I ask that you support this important legislation so we can answer the most important question of all, what's the number needed. With this we can make targeted investments to produce the workforce for the future.

Thank you.