

February 20, 2024

Testimony on **LD 2200 – *Resolve, to Attract and Retain Behavioral Health Clinicians***

Greetings Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments in support of LD 2200. My name is Chris McLaughlin, and I am humbled to be the Executive Director of the Maine Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW ME). On behalf of our over 1000 members here in Maine, I'm honored to share thoughts on this important piece of proposed legislation. I also am a licensed clinical social worker with almost 25 years of experience providing and leading behavioral health services across a variety of treatment settings here in Maine. Most of my clinical career has been spent supporting children and families residing here in our great state.

LD 2200 is an essential piece to the puzzle that is Maine's current behavioral health crisis. According to NAMI Maine, more than 200,000 adults in Maine, nearly 1 in 4, are living with mental health conditions. Further, we know that according to the 2023 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, almost 18% of high school students and 22% of middle school students have seriously considered suicide in the last 12 months. The acute behavioral health needs of our state will not simply improve on their own. Maine needs more trained behavioral health clinicians to provide the much needed access to care that so many of our residents need. Innovative solutions, such as what LD 2200 offers, are needed now more than ever to address the behavioral health workforce challenges of our state. It is only through an enhanced workforce will we see improvements to the barriers of service access that have crippled Maine's behavioral healthcare system of care. You all are very aware of the lengthy waitlists that exist for nearly every level of care service in Maine. You have heard the heartbreaking stories from individuals and caregivers all across Maine of folks who desperately need and want behavioral health treatment but who are unable to access it due to waitlists and other access challenges. These individuals do not have the luxury of time to wait... Their stories sadly and, far too often, often end in tragedy.

By itself, LD 2200 will not solve all the problems related to behavioral health access for Maine. However, we believe that LD 2200 is one of a series of solutions that, when combined, can and will shift Maine into a better and safer direction for all who live here. I urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 2200.

Thank you for your time and consideration,



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