



Committee on Health and Human Services

Re: LD 258 - Resolve, to Establish a Program to Recruit and Retain Behavioral Health Clinicians

March 10, 2025

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Gia Drew, and I am the Executive Director of EqualityMaine, which has been advocating on behalf of Maine's LGBTQ+ community since 1984. We strongly support legislation that can help to address our current behavioral health workforce shortages.

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults are more than twice as likely as heterosexual adults to experience a mental health condition, and transgender people are nearly four times as likely as cisgender people to experience a mental health condition. Health disparities among LGBTQ+ people are linked to stigma and discrimination - many in the LGBTQ+ community face prejudice, denial of civil and human rights, harassment, and family rejection, which can lead to new or worsened symptoms particularly for those with intersecting racial or socioeconomic identities.¹ While in some cases, LGBTQ+ people access mental health care more frequently than non-LGBTQ+ people, their need for services is greater, and policies seeking to curtail access and rights of LGBTQ+ people threaten to worsen these disparities. According to a 2022 KFF survey, 67% of LGBTQ+ people reported needing a mental health service over the past two years (compared to 39% of non-LGBTQ+ people). Yet, only about half of LGBTQ+ people with a reported need sought and received mental health services (similar to the share among non-LGBTQ+ people). Findings from the study suggest that inability to secure appointments as well as lengthy wait times are significant barriers to care.²

¹ Jennifer Kates, Usha Ranji. "Health and Access to Care and Coverage for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Individuals in the U.S." KFF, 3 May 2018, www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/health-and-access-to-care-and-coverage-for-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-individuals-in-the-u-s/.

² Lindsey Dawson, Brittini Frederiksen. "Mental Health Care Needs and Experiences Among LGBT+ People." KFF, www.kff.org/mental-health/issue-brief/mental-health-care-needs-and-experiences-among-lgbt-people/.

Maine is experiencing critical shortages in its behavioral health workforce, particularly for clinicians. In a January-February 2024 point-in-time survey, 50 behavioral health organizations and 277 behavioral health clinicians across Maine provided data on access to care and workforce issues, with 20 agencies reporting clinician vacancies of over 20%. Nearly 13,000 patients were seeking an individual provider, mental health counseling, or prescribing services in Maine, and, shockingly, waiting an average of eight months for care. Patients with the longest wait times were those waiting for mental health counseling, with more than 8,000 patients waiting for six to 24 months.³ The difficulty in hiring and retaining clinicians is an issue in rural and urban communities, with many behavioral health clinicians seeking jobs in other states that provide incentives such as robust loan repayments. And while The Trevor Project recently found LGBTQ+ youth in Maine are at heightened risk of depression, anxiety, or suicidal thoughts (often stemming from bullying and discrimination),⁴ agencies are reporting that clinical positions for school- or home-based services for youth are the hardest to recruit and retain staff.

We urge you to vote “Ought to Pass” on LD 258 and any other effort to address our behavioral health workforce shortage. We must ensure that we have the workforce needed to keep all Mainers healthy and safe.

Thank you,

Gia Drew (she/her)
Executive Director, EqualityMaine

³naswme.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=KUIaoCFCT8I%3D&portalid=27#:~:text=%208%2C913%20clients%20are%20waiting%20for%20mental,providers%20for%20an%20average%20of%2033%20weeks.

⁴ “State Reports: Maine (2024).” *The Trevor Project*, 28 Feb. 2025, www.thetrevorproject.org/state-reports-maine-2024/.