

## POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT

### **LD 1311 An Act to Expand Maine's Health Care Workforce by Improving Educational Opportunities Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services**

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine supports the passage of the *An Act to Expand Maine's Health Care Workforce by Improving Educational Opportunities*. NAMI Maine advocates strongly to provide mental health care services to the 1 in 4 Mainers who are diagnosed with a mental health challenge. We also support initiatives to develop and expand the workforce, thereby increasing access to critical services throughout our state.

Before the occurrence of COVID-19, Maine was, unfortunately, recognized nationally as having a critical shortage of mental health providers. Since the onset of the pandemic, the shortage has continued to grow. The Health Resources and Services Administration, as well as Mental Health America, identify Maine as having significant deficits in the mental health workforce at many levels. A point-in-time survey was conducted by the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services in Maine and the National Association of Social Workers in Maine in January and February of 2024, providing staggering statistics on the status of the behavioral health workforce in Maine. Currently, 40% of independent behavioral health providers are 60 years or older, 45% plan to retire within the next five years, and 67% plan to retire within the next ten years, without providing opportunities for learning throughout the state and pathways for entrance and development in the field to anticipate the significant increase in openings set to come.

NAMI Maine expresses some concern about the language used in the bill. Although it is reported that this is to be opened to all healthcare workforce settings, it appears to be significantly linked to the medical field. Shortages in rural areas throughout Maine in all health professions are creating risks for our communities. In reviewing the language of the bills, we ask that the committee consider the vernacular of all health professionals and ensure that it uses encompassing and inclusive language.

NAMI Maine supports the work and initiatives of this committee in ensuring that critical resources and services are provided in the state. The development of a robust workforce and development of a pipeline to increase the workforce to support our communities is necessary. Because of this, NAMI Maine supports the passage of LD 1311.

**ABOUT NAMI MAINE:** Incorporated in 1984, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine Chapter (NAMI Maine) is the state's largest grassroots mental health organization. With support from national and regional affiliates, the agency is dedicated to building better lives for everyone impacted by behavioral health concerns. NAMI Maine engages with leaders and community partners at all levels to improve the state's mental health system through collaboration and education.

## LEGISLATIVE CONTACT

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