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April 8, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Chair
Representative Meyer, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: LD 1380 – *Resolve, Establishing the Study Group on Solutions to Address Maine’s Behavioral Health Workforce Shortage*

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to provide information neither for nor against LD 1380, *Resolve, Establishing the Study Group on Solutions to Address Maine’s Behavioral Health Workforce Shortage*.

This resolve establishes the Study Group on Solutions to Address Maine’s Behavioral Health Workforce Shortage, which is directed to review the State’s behavioral health workforce needs and assess the feasibility of strategies and initiatives for recommended changes. The 14-member group shall submit a report to the Legislature in December 2025 after examining:

- Information on current workforce trends and challenges including, but not limited to, impact on access to behavioral health services for individuals and families;
- The feasibility and impact of establishing a pilot program for community behavioral health teaching agencies in partnership with behavioral health providers, higher education institutions and other technical assistance or training organizations similar to the program established by the State of Washington;
- The feasibility and impact of enhancing the State’s loan repayment program for the behavioral health field; and
- The feasibility and impact of introducing a stipend program for behavioral health students and interns.

The Department is supportive of discussing viable strategies and initiatives to improve Maine’s behavioral health workforce. However, this bill is duplicative of several efforts in recent months that have focused on the behavioral health workforce, including numerous stakeholder groups and reports to the Legislature on preliminary findings. Some examples of this progress include:

- LD 2083, “*Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services to Establish a Stakeholder Group to Study Timely Access to Psychiatric Medication Management Services Across the State*” (report submitted in February 2025);
- The stakeholder study funded by the John T. Gorman Foundation which included a report specific to the segment of behavioral health workforces serving children and youth; and

- A September 2024 summit and associated report titled, “*Maine’s Behavioral Health Access and Workforce Challenges: Solutions to a Growing Problem.*”

A theme found in these studies and reports is that behavioral health workforce data is limited, and when data is available, it is often inconsistent between states and on the national level, often limiting the ability to compare Maine to other States. While this may continue to impose challenges, OBH’s written testimony on LD 258, “*Resolve, to Establish a Program to Recruit and Retain Behavioral Health Clinicians,*” provided additional information on what initiatives may be most practical to pursue. Examples of possible recommendations from the work the Department has performed include:

- Reviewing the success of the bonuses for Direct Support and Home and Community-Based Services workforces which demonstrated [21% increase in the workforce](#) with a smaller investment and greater organization or provider autonomy than proposed in LD 258;
- Some providers have expressed support for finder fees and recruitment costs, particularly for more niche types of clinicians; and
- Consideration of loan repayment programs and stipends for residences, similar to what is proposed in this resolve as well as programs like the J-1 Visa Waiver Program.

The Department believes that building from what has been learned from similar workgroups and what is currently being examined by the Department and its partners would conserve resources and retain the focus on the existing forward momentum. The Department can provide additional details on the current work in progress that serves to address similar concerns this workgroup would be entrusted with as requested or helpful for the Committee’s deliberation.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions during your deliberation of this bill.

Sincerely,



Sarah Squirrell
Director
Office of Behavioral Health
Maine Department of Health and Human Services