



Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine
The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers

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Testimony in Support of
An Act Establishing Alternative Pathways to Social Worker Licensing –
LD 1298

April 15, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and honorable members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services. My name is Adam Bloom-Paicopolos. I am a resident of Wells and am proud to serve as the Executive Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine (the Alliance). The Alliance is the statewide association representing Maine's community-based behavioral health agencies who provide much-needed mental health and substance use services to over 80,000 children, adults, and families annually. The Alliance advocates for the implementation of sound policies and evidence-based practices that serve to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our behavioral health care system.

On behalf of the Alliance, I am here today to support LD 1298, "An Act Establishing Alternative Pathways to Social Worker Licensing." This bill represents a critical step in addressing Maine's behavioral health workforce crisis and improving access to care for thousands of Mainers currently waiting for services.

The Alliance and NASW-Maine conducted a point-in-time survey in early 2024 that revealed alarming data about the state of behavioral health access in Maine. I have attached the study for your review. The survey found that 10,012 Mainers were waiting for mental health counseling services, with an average wait time of 32 weeks, and 69% of these individuals were waiting ten months or more for mental health counseling. Additionally, 2,819 individuals were waiting for mental health prescribing services, with an average wait time of 33 weeks. These numbers reflect a system in crisis, where individuals in need of care face unacceptable delays that worsen their conditions and lead to poorer outcomes.

This access crisis is directly linked to critical workforce shortages across behavioral health professions. Our survey identified vacancy rates between 6% and 21% among organizations providing behavioral health services, with the highest vacancy rates (21%) reported for mental health clinicians. Several key factors contribute to this workforce shortage. Across the legislature, many proposals aim to increase the number of clinicians available to serve Maine families in crisis. However, many of those proposals require financial investment. Importantly, this bill does not.

This bill is a common-sense workforce proposal. It would remove one universally identified barrier to clinical licensure. Even the ASWB has recognized the barriers the exam poses. LD 1298 establishes an alternative pathway for social worker licensure that maintains high standards. Notably, the bill requires candidates to attempt the ASWB exam first. Again, everyone still must pay the \$230 or \$260

(depending on licensure level) and take the exam as the first step to licensure. For those who do not pass the licensure exam, LD 1298 provides an alternative pathway, including completion of a jurisprudence examination as prescribed by the board, demonstration of competence in the nine competencies established by the Council on Social Work Education, additional supervised practice requirements, and letters of recommendation from licensed clinical social workers. This approach addresses systemic disparities in the current licensing process while ensuring public protection through multiple competency assessments.

The current workforce shortage severely affects behavioral health organizations across Maine. The providers we represent face continued choices regarding reducing or closing services due to staffing challenges. Rural organizations are seeing dwindling applications for positions, and providers report high levels of burnout and moral distress due to their inability to serve those in need.

LD 1298 removes unnecessary barriers while maintaining rigorous competency assessment. I respectfully urge you to support LD 1298. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony this afternoon. I would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Adam Bloom-Paicopolos", written in a cursive style.

Adam Bloom-Paicopolos, MPP
Executive Director