

## **Testimony LD 1590: An Act to Reduce the Counselor and Social Worker Shortage by Amending Reciprocity Requirements for Those Professionals from Other Jurisdictions**

Good afternoon Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and esteemed members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Finance,

My name is Julie Schirmer. I am a Falmouth resident and am testifying for the National Association of Social Work, Maine Chapter (NASW ME) in support of LD 1590: An Act to Reduce the Counselor and Social Worker Shortage by Amending Reciprocity Requirements for Those Professionals from Other Jurisdictions. This measure is one way to address the behavioral health shortages in Maine by reducing barriers to licensure, with minimal to no costs, to help address the rising behavioral health needs in our communities.

The crisis in our behavioral health workforce is real. As I have testified before, community agencies report vacancy rates of 22% or more for behavioral health clinicians, with 30% or more vacancy rates reported in Aroostook and more rural areas. Agencies report cutting down or closing services, particularly in rural areas and schools. One focus group participant reported, *"We used to have three applicants for every position. We now have three open positions for every one applicant."*

Approximately 100 schools have lost their behavioral health clinicians in the past year. At the same time, teachers report increased disruptive behaviors, behavioral incidents, and crises in the classroom, taking away from teaching and learning (MEPRI Report, 2025).

Anxiety levels are rising, with Maine reporting the highest rate of child anxiety (ages 6-11) in the nation, more than two times the national prevalence for this age group (Peters, 2024). In 2024, the American Psychological Association's (APA) annual mental health poll revealed that 43% of adults reported feeling more anxious than they did the year before, compared to 37% in 2023 and 32% in 2022, showing a steady increase in anxiety over the past few years (APA, 2024).

This bill makes it easier for clinicians to move to Maine and immediately start providing care to the 10,000 or more clients waiting 7 months or longer for outpatient counseling services, the 1340 clients waiting an average of 25 weeks for case management, or the 418 waiting an average of 14 weeks for substance use counseling (Behavioral Health Access and Workforce Study, 2024). The number of new Maine social work clinicians has been dropping each year during the last 4 years, from a high of 377 in 2021 to a low of 148 in 2023 (Maine Department of Professional and Licensing Regulations, 2024). This bill can help replace services provided by workers who have moved out of state or have retired.

Reciprocity complements but does not replace social work and other behavioral health compacts. It reduces barriers to moving into or providing care in Maine, can be implemented immediately, and has no fiscal note.

Please vote "ought to pass" on this important measure.

Best,

Julie M. Schirmer, LCSW, ACSW,  
President, NASW Maine Board of Directors

**References:**

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Peters, J. (2024). "The pressure of unmet needs" : Elementary school social workers' lived experiences caring for students with anxiety since the COVID-19 pandemic. [Doctoral dissertation, Simmons University]. [Simmons University Archives, Boston, MA]  
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