

Bill LD 2144: Resolve, to Establish the Working Group to Prioritize Wellness and Mental Health Resources for Heritage Industries

Amanda Roome, PhD
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To the Committee Chair & Members:

I am a Research Scientist at the Northeast Center for Occupational Health & Safety. Although we are based in Cooperstown, NY, our team has collaborated extensively with partners in Maine and across the Northeast on work within heritage industries (agriculture, fisheries, and forestry). I write in strong support of Bill LD 2144 which would establish a working group to prioritize wellness and mental health resources for workers that Maine relies on.

In an ongoing healthcare access study in two small fishing communities in Maine, commercial fishermen identified their top 3 concerns as musculoskeletal issues, **stress/mental health, and substance use/drinking** disorders. In an industry that has one of the highest rates of occupational fatalities and injuries, many of which are traumatic and disabling, it is notable that stress and mental health resources are among the biggest priorities for these fishing communities.

In this same study, probable PTSD rates in male fishermen were slightly above the national average (national average: 4%, Maine fishermen: 4.4%). On a larger scale, a study our organization conducted with commercial fishermen in 3 US states suggested probable Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder (PTSD) rates in male fishermen at 3 times the national average (12%). In both studies, female fishermen showed higher rates of probable PTSD than the national average, although the number of women in the study was low.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Scores were also collected in our study. This series of questions measures the number of traumatic events (abuse, neglect, household dysfunction, etc.) a person experienced before age 18. The higher the score, the greater the risk for serious health, social, and mental health problems in adulthood. 42% of fishermen in the study were within the “intermediate risk” category, which indicates a need for monitoring and education, while 9% were within the “high risk” category, indicating a significantly elevated likelihood of chronic health problems, mental illness (like anxiety, depression and/or PTSD), substance use and risky behaviors. This further highlights the need for crucial mental health and wellness resources to be tailored to fishing communities.

LD 2144 is a practical step to move from isolated efforts to a coordinated, sustainable plan. Episodic and fragmented efforts to address mental health and stress are not typically successful in the long-term. Bill LD 2144 would provide the first step in a coordinated, sustained response to these key issues facing Maine constituents. For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to vote “yes” on Bill LD 2144.

Amanda Roome
Cooperstown, NY
LD 2144

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