

**University of Maine System Testimony In Support of
LD 2144, *Resolve, to Establish the Working Group to Prioritize Wellness and
Mental Health Resources for Heritage Industries* – Presented by UMS Chief
External & Governmental Affairs Officer Sam Warren – January 28, 2026**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: My name is Sam Warren and I am the Chief External & Governmental Affairs Officer for the University of Maine System (UMS).

I am here today on behalf of University of Maine Cooperative Extension to speak in **strong support of LD 2144 and to make clear our commitment to participating in the important Working Group proposed by this bill and assisting in implementing its recommendations.**

Extension brings research, education, and outreach from Maine's R1 land, sea, and space grant university to homes, schools, farms, and communities in your legislative districts. As part of its statewide activities to strengthen and grow Maine's agricultural economy and dependent rural jobs, Extension delivers research-based, community-driven education and technical assistance to farmers.

One increasingly important area of its focus has been on farmer mental health. According to a recent survey administered by Extension of those who work in Maine farming, fishing, and forestry sectors, 46% of respondents said they were **unsure of where to get help/treatment** for a mental health condition, 48% said **availability of help/treatment in their community was a barrier**, and 61% said cost of help/treatment was a barrier. Additionally, as noted in the preamble of this Resolve, 61% said **public education to raise awareness** would reduce stigma about mental health and make support more readily available.

To address those serious and growing needs, in September, Extension convened the **first-ever Maine Land and Sea Farmer Wellness Forum**, supported by funding from the Northeast Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, and the Maine Department of Marine Resources. The intent of this event was to promote the sharing of best practices and the development of partnerships, programming, and policies to better support Maine farmers' health and wellness.

Beyond invaluable new connections, the key takeaway from this forum was that many dedicated Maine individuals and organizations are working to support mental health in

the heritage industries, and that **better coordination and communication** among them are urgently needed to fully leverage this breadth of resources.

The Working Group established by the enactment of this Resolve would **directly advance that coordination for the betterment of our farmers, forest workers, fishermen, and our economy and communities**, while also identifying further opportunities to expand and enhance services and collaboration. For this reason, LD 2144 has Extension's full support and commitment. We applaud the bill's bipartisan sponsors for elevating the mental health crisis among heritage industry workers and, by doing so, reducing stigma and improving awareness and access to support. Additionally, we invite you to visit [Extension's website](http://extension.umaine.edu) at extension.umaine.edu for relevant farmer resilience resources, including information about our Maine AgrAbility, Maine Agricultural Mediation, and Farm Coaching programs.

Thank you for your ongoing support of the University of Maine System, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, and our statewide efforts to promote prosperity through education, research, and outreach.