



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION

AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002

(207) 287-1400

TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

## Lydia V. Crafts

4 Mills Rd. Box 13

Newcastle, ME 04553

Phone: (207) 593-2664

Lydia.Crafts@legislature.maine.gov

*Testimony of Rep. Lydia Crafts introducing*  
**LD 632, An Act to Amend the Social Work Education Loan Repayment Program**  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic  
Advancement and Business*

Good Afternoon Senator Curry, Representative Roberts and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business. I am Representative Lydia Crafts and I come before you today to testify in support of LD 632, "An Act to Amend the Social Work Education Loan Repayment Program.

This program, in its original form, provided three annual awards of \$5,000 and was never funded. Our amendment language presented today expands the program to serve 100 annual awards of \$20,000. This expansion, along with broadening the qualifying roles, is designed to help address the shortage of social workers across our state.

As any Mainer will tell you, our state is facing a labor shortage of mighty proportions. Mental health service providers are not immune. In a state with over 6,000 licensed social workers, agencies and job boards report hundreds of openings, often in some of the most critical roles working with Maine's most vulnerable residents.

Simultaneously, young people, adults, and older Mainers are struggling to manage and maintain their mental health. Recent reports indicate 1 in 3 high school females has considered suicide, our drug and alcohol related overdose fatalities continue to shatter heartbreaking records each year (716 opioid fatalities in 2022), and local mental health agencies report that they have thousands of Mainers on their waitlists. A family in Washington County will spend on average 435 days on a wait list for Home and Community based mental health treatment. As families try to survive without services, as our loved ones overdose from poisonings, and as our schools and law enforcement agencies are left to pick up the pieces, we have to find practical solutions that prevent disastrous crises.

This legislation before you provides a direct avenue to recruit and retain professionals in the state of Maine. Social workers, many of whom are educated (like myself) at a Maine institution, provide the most efficient and cost effective direct services to people in their

communities. Most Mainers seeking mental health support will begin in outpatient counseling or case management, the majority of both services provided by social workers. This entry point is crucial in reducing or minimizing the need for hospitalizations, law enforcement involvement, and child protective services.

Unfortunately, clinical social workers carry an average debt of \$74,000. In a field with relatively low wages compared with other healthcare professions, they have some of the highest debt to income ratios in the field. This burden weighs heavily on many individuals as they decide whether to leave the field for higher paying jobs, especially in our current labor market.

Finally, for every behavioral health bill that comes before our body, we will have to ask, “Where do we find employees to staff these life saving programs?” LD 632 sets Maine on a path to attract and retain a critical segment of our workforce. I hope you will support this effort and I’ll be more than happy to answer any questions.

## Maine Suicide & Depression – 2021 MIYHS High School Report

					Significance Tests
	Questions	Answers of Interest	Maine 2021 95% CI*	Maine 2019 95% CI*	A. Maine 2021 vs. Maine 2019
16.	During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities? (hn42/hn42)	Percentage of students who answered "Yes"	<b>35.9%</b> (34.9% - 37.0%)	32.1% (31.0% - 33.2%)	H
17.	During the past 12 months, when you felt sad or hopeless, from whom did you get help? (Select only one response.) (hn43b/hn43b)	Among students who have ever felt sad or hopeless during the past 12 months, the percentage of students who answered that they got help from an adult	<b>23.7%</b> (22.8% - 24.5%)	25.2% (24.3% - 26.1%)	
18.	During the past 12 months, when you felt sad or hopeless, from whom did you get help? (Select only one response.) (hn43b_2/hn43b_2)	Among students who have ever felt sad or hopeless during the past 12 months, the percentage of students who answered that they got help from a teacher or other school staff	<b>2.2%</b> (1.9% - 2.4%)	3.7% (3.3% - 4.0%)	L
19.	During the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide? (hn44/hn44)	Percentage of students who answered "Yes"	<b>18.5%</b> (17.8% - 19.3%)	16.4% (15.6% - 17.2%)	H

## Maine Suicide & Depression – 2021 MIYHS Middle School Report

					Significance Tests
	Questions	Answers of Interest	Maine 2021 95% CI*	Maine 2019 95% CI*	A. Maine 2021 vs. Maine 2019
4.	Have you ever felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities? (mn153/mn153)	Percentage of students who answered "Yes"	<b>29.6%</b> (28.3% - 31.0%)	24.8% (23.4% - 26.2%)	H
5.	Have you ever seriously thought about killing yourself? (mn25/mn25)	Percentage of students who answered "Yes"	<b>20.0%</b> (18.9% - 21.1%)	19.8% (19.0% - 20.7%)	