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Testimony of Rep. Holly T. Sargent introducing

**LD 1506, a Resolve Directing the Department of Health and Human Service to
Study the Scarcity of Licensed Clinical Behavioral Health Professionals
Across the State**

Before the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee

Good afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Perry and members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee. My name is Holly Sargent, and I represent District 147, two-thirds of York. I am pleased to introduce **LD 1506, a Resolve Directing the Department of Health and Human Service to Study the Scarcity of Licensed Clinical Behavioral Health Professionals Across the State.**

The genesis of this bill was two conversations I had with residents in my district. The first was with a 70-year-old Clinical Psychologist, who was eager to retire but was worried that there was no one to whom she could refer her patients. The second conversation was with a constituent who was desperately searching for a geriatric psychiatrist to treat her husband. Despite excellent insurance and the means to pay whatever was necessary, the waiting period she encountered was 7-9 months.

My obvious reaction was to ask *why* and *what can be done?*

Ah, the innocence of the gung-ho new legislator.

As I began to ask questions and listen to input from many directions, I realized the scope and severity of our behavioral health challenges. I learned that we had lost many licensed professionals, particularly psychiatrists and clinical psychologists, to retirement during COVID. I learned of the unceasing problems of low reimbursement rates, the geographic disparities in care and the absence of a reliable educational pipeline for licensed clinical providers.

Everywhere I turned, I heard about the crisis of mental health. The shortage of behavioral health professionals created longer wait lists, discharge plans that didn't happen, increased acuity, children and adults living in emergency departments.

We needed to increase our behavioral health workforce, but efforts seemed fragmented and insufficient.

I then turned to the experts: Lisa Harvey McPherson, Katie Fullum Harris, Michele Meyer, Colleen Madigan, Betsy Sweet and Malory Shaughnessey to see how I, as a new legislator, might help.

This Resolve is the suggested first step. Drawing from the lessons learned from the extensive study and multifaceted action plan that emerged around the nursing staffing shortage, we framed this as a constructive and essential first step. We need a more comprehensive base-line. Increasing capacity requires that we know how many behavioral health professionals we need today, how many we need to add to the workforce over the next 10 years, what our educational capacity is and how many more graduates are needed. We need to look at a variety of incentives, possibly partnerships and successful strategies from other states. This bill provides the framework needed to create a data driven approach to address the behavioral health access challenges and serve the people of Maine. The experts assured me that this was a problem long in the making.

I ask that you support this legislation so we can gather the data and evidence to make targeted investments to produce the workforce for the future.

Sincerely,

Holly Sargent
District 147