

131st Legislature
Senate of
Maine
Senate District 2

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LD 2200, "Resolve, to Attract and Retain Behavioral Health Clinicians"

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
February 20, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

I am Trey Stewart; and I represent Senate District 2, which includes several communities in Penobscot and Aroostook Counties. I am here today to present LD 2200, "*Resolve, to Attract and Retain Behavioral Health Clinicians.*"

This proposal is very simple, really. It provides a \$25,000 sign-on bonus during fiscal year 2024-25 for behavioral health clinicians to live and work in Maine. The Department of Health and Human Services will develop and implement the program and establish criteria regarding participation.

It is abundantly clear that Maine is in desperate need of behavioral health clinicians. As members of this committee of jurisdiction, you are all very well aware of the scope of the problem. Just yesterday a quick job search found 147 behavioral health clinician jobs and 344 mental health clinician jobs available in Maine posted on Indeed.com and 176 behavioral healthcare jobs found on careersatmainehealth.org. I do not believe we need to study the issue or take more time to look into the problem. We need to act. We need to act now. Furthermore, I do not believe we should offer a tax credit or some other tax incentive. If we are serious about bringing qualified practitioners to this state, let's "put our money where our mouth is." This sign-on bonus – cash in hand – will help an individual purchase a home or use for other moving expenses. This could actually be the incentive that tips the scales with someone deciding between job offers.

I have found that sign-on bonuses are not unique within the behavioral health field. Kennebec Behavioral Health has advertised bonuses between \$1000-\$7500 for various jobs within their operations and Spurwink posted a \$10,000 bonus for a clinician to work with adults with mental health and substance use needs. It is quite easy to find other states with various sign-on bonuses in this profession.

We need to do something now – not in six months or a year. People are desperate for help. I am sure you hear from constituents just as I do that they cannot find a provider. This is a very small price to pay when we're talking about saving lives.

Finally, I would like to offer my support for a very recent language addition to the bill that would add clarification regarding eligibility, which would include that the participant be licensed to practice in a clinical capacity and the employer be a community-based agency licensed by the State to provide mental health or substance use disorder treatment services.

Thank you very much for your time and thoughtful consideration.