



Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine
The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers
Malory Otteson Shaughnessy, Executive Director

Testimony in Support of LD 2200
Resolve, to Attract and Retain Behavioral Health Clinicians

Sponsored by Senator Stewart
2.20.2024

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Good afternoon Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Malory Shaughnessy, I am a resident of Westbrook, and the Executive Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services. The Alliance is the statewide association representing the majority of Maine's community-based providers of these much-needed services, providing care annually to over 80,000 Maine men, women, and children. The Alliance advocates for the implementation of sound policies and evidence-based practices that serve to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our behavioral health care system.

On behalf of the Alliance and the thousands of youth and families that they serve, I am here today to speak in support of LD 2200 **Resolve, to Attract and Retain Behavioral Health Clinicians**. I am also speaking in support of this legislation on behalf of the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative, usually represented by Betsy Sweet, who is unable to be here today.

We thank Senator Stewart for bringing forward this legislation.

This resolve directs the Department of Health and Human Services to develop and implement a program to provide a \$25,000 recruitment and retention incentive to behavioral health clinicians in the State during fiscal year 2024-25.

We would propose a slight amendment to the legislation to add some clarification regarding eligibility in Section 1, 1. We would suggest that the final language be amended to **"Eligibility criteria to participate in the program (must 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)"** as this would reflect the intent of the bill which I believe is to bring more clinicians into our community based system of care.

This is a straightforward way to entice clinicians to either come and practice in Maine, or to return to the community-based system of behavioral health care where they are needed desperately.

As this committee has heard time and again, we have a workforce shortage crisis in our system of care for mental health and substance use disorder. This legislative proposal would directly address this need and provide the funding for community agencies to compete with larger systems of care to recruit and retain clinical staff.

I will not deluge you with statistics about the growing waitlists for community based mental health and substance use services, the number of unstaffed beds we have in residential facilities, or the number of children and adults stuck in hospital emergency departments awaiting community placements – you have already heard all of this before.

I will simply restate that **this is a straightforward way to entice clinicians to either come and practice in Maine, or to return to the community-based system of behavioral health care where they are needed desperately.**

Please vote Ought to Pass on this legislation. I would be happy to provide any additional information that you might require. Thank you.

Resolve, to Attract and Retain Behavioral Health Clinicians

Sec. 1. Department of Health and Human Services to develop and implement program to provide recruitment and retention incentive to behavioral health clinicians. Resolved: That, to support the recruitment and retention of behavioral health clinicians in the State, the Department of Health and Human Services shall develop and implement a program to provide, during fiscal year 2024-25, a \$25,000 recruitment and retention incentive to those behavioral health clinicians in the State who meet criteria established by the department. The program developed by the department must, at a minimum, require that a behavioral health clinician and an employer sign a written agreement that includes conditions determined by the department for receiving the recruitment and retention incentive. The department shall establish criteria regarding participation in the program, including, but not limited to:

1. Eligibility criteria to participate in the program (*must 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*);

2. The minimum period of time a behavioral health clinician must agree to be employed by an employer; and

3. Conditions under which employment may be terminated by the behavioral health clinician or an employer and any obligations of the behavioral health clinician or an employer if employment is terminated, including the conditions under which the behavioral health clinician is required to repay the recruitment and retention incentive.

Sec. 2. Report. Resolved: That, by November 6, 2024, the Department of Health and Human Services shall submit a report regarding the recruitment and retention incentive program developed and implemented pursuant to section 1 to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over health and human services matters.

SUMMARY

This resolve directs the Department of Health and Human Services to develop and implement a program to provide a \$25,000 recruitment and retention incentive to behavioral health clinicians in the State during fiscal year 2024-25. It directs the department to establish criteria regarding participation in the program and to submit a report regarding the program to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over health and human services matters.

With respect to a qualified individual who is a behavioral health clinician, that individual must be licensed to practice in a clinical capacity in an agency licensed by the State to provide mental health or substance use disorder treatment services.