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Inland Hospital
Maine Coast Hospital
Mayo Hospital
Mercy Hospital
Northern Light Health Foundation
Northern Light Pharmacy
Sebasticook Valley Hospital

LD 2200 Resolve, to Attract and Retain Behavioral Health Clinicians

Testimony in Support February 20, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Lisa Harvey-McPherson RN. I am here today providing testimony on behalf of Northern Light Health and our member organizations speaking in support of this bill. Northern Light Health member organizations include 10 hospitals located in southern, central, eastern and northern Maine, 8 nursing facilities, air and ground ambulance, behavioral health, addiction treatment, pharmacy, primary and specialty care practices and a state-wide home care and hospice program. Ninety three percent of Maine's population lives in the Northern Light Health service area. Northern Light Health is also proud to be one of Maine's largest employers with more than 10,000 employees statewide.

Northern Light Acadia Hospital is a 100 bed licensed hospital providing comprehensive inpatient and outpatient services caring for the people of Maine. Patients throughout the State are served by Acadia behavioral health clinicians, many residing in northern and eastern Maine. We offer a variety of services for adults, children and teens. Some of the services we offer include mental health evaluation, medication management, individual and family therapy, specialized outpatient group therapy, occupational therapy, care coordination, day treatment services, inpatient treatment and school based services.

Northern Light Acadia Hospital recently completed a major renovation project that constructed a 49,000 square foot addition to the hospital creating a state of the art 50 bed child and adolescent wing. The project also renovated the existing adult inpatient space. Today Northern Light Acadia Hospital is among the very few psychiatric hospitals to provide all 100 of on inpatients with a private room. 100 private rooms expands our inpatient census from an average of 60 per day to full capacity. Increasing our inpatient census also requires more clinicians to provide care.

In 2023 we implemented a recruitment plan to hire clinicians to meet the current need as well as the expanded need for staff when renovated hospital began admitting a higher number of adults and children. During this 12 month period we posted 157 clinical positions. The largest number of positions were nursing – 73 RN's and 18 NP's, followed by 51 social worker/counselor positions, While the numbers were smaller, 14 positions, recruiting for psychologists and psychiatrists is often a national recruitment effort. The average number of days to fill a position is approximately 59 days.

Workforce development and recruitment is a significant investment. At Northern Light Acadia Hospital we support students in nursing, social worker, counselor, therapy and psychology education programs with thousands of hours of clinical training supervised by Acadia clinical staff. Addressing the critical need for psychiatrists Northern Light Acadia Hospital is starting a psychiatry residency program to train the behavioral health physician workforce for the future.

The bill before you today focuses on recruitment and retention of behavioral health clinicians by providing a \$25,000 incentive during fiscal state year 2024 and 2025. This resource provides another financial tool in the behavioral health workforce toolkit supporting the expanded need for behavioral health services caring for the people of Maine. The bill also directs the Department of Health and Human Services to develop and implement the incentive program. We recommend that language be added to the bill requiring the department to work with employers of behavioral health clinicians to develop program criteria.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this important legislation.