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Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine *The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers*

Testimony in Support of

Resolve, to Establish a Program to Recruit and Retain Behavioral Health Clinicians – LD 258

March 10th, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Adam Bloom-Paicopolos. I am a resident of Wells and am proud to serve as the Executive Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine (the Alliance). The Alliance is the statewide association representing Maine's community-based behavioral health agencies who provide much-needed mental health and substance use services to over 80,000 children, adults, and families annually. 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, I am here today to speak in strong support of LD 258, which would establish a much-needed program to support the recruitment and retention of behavioral health clinicians through a one-time \$25,000 incentive.

Maine is in the midst of a behavioral health workforce crisis. Across our state, community behavioral health organizations are struggling to recruit and retain clinical providers. We all know that behavioral health professionals play a crucial role in addressing the mental health and substance use disorder needs of individuals, children, and families – but as we see this demand continue to rise in Maine, our workforce is struggling to keep up.

Earlier this year, the Alliance, NASW Maine, and other partner organizations conducted a point-in-time study and hosted a Behavioral Health Access and Workforce Summit to identify and discuss the challenges facing our behavioral health workforce. Our research uncovered a **21% vacancy rate for organization-based behavioral health clinicians** across the state. Corresponding waitlists for organization-based mental health counseling averaged 32 weeks – **that's over 7 months to receive care**.

These long waitlists, staff burnout, and facility closures due to workforce challenges have become all too common, jeopardizing access to essential mental health and substance use treatment services. We need a workforce that is well-trained and adequately supported so that they can focus on improving patient outcomes and the well-being of our communities. Without bold action, this crisis will continue to deepen, putting vulnerable Mainers at risk.

LD 258 is a critical step toward stabilizing and strengthening our behavioral health workforce and investing in Maine's future. The new incentives included in this

legislation will help attract new clinicians to the field and encourage existing professionals to remain in community-based organizations. This investment is not just about sheer numbers – it's about ensuring that Mainers have access to timely, high-quality care to meet their behavioral health needs, particularly in our rural areas. Growing our behavioral health workforce will help more individuals achieve long-term recovery, receive treatment, and reduce unnecessary emergency room visits because behavioral health care wasn't available in their community when they needed it.

By addressing workforce shortages now, we can create a more sustainable and accessible system of care for years to come. I respectfully urge this committee to support LD 258 and make the necessary investments to address our state's behavioral health workforce crisis.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony this afternoon and for your consideration of this critical issue. I would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adam Bloom-Paicopolos', with a stylized, cursive script.

Adam Bloom-Paicopolos, MPP
Executive Director