

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

**Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
March 10, 2025**

Senator Ingwersen, 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 to you LD 258, "*Resolve, to Establish a Program to Recruit and Retain Behavioral Health Clinicians.*" Those of you who served on this Committee last session may recall I submitted the same bill just over a year ago. Unfortunately, the proposal was voted out Ought Not To Pass. Of course, I am hoping you will give this bill your thoughtful consideration and support this measure, allowing it to go to the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee for funding deliberations.

This proposal is not complicated. It provides a \$25,000 sign-on bonus for behavioral health clinicians to live and work in Maine and the Department of Health and Human Services will develop and implement the program and establish criteria regarding participation.

Maine is in desperate need of behavioral health clinicians. There is no doubt you are all very well aware of the scope of the problem. We have been talking about it for years and the time to act is long overdue. We no longer need to look at statistics, gather data or 'study the issue.' I think too often we, as members of the Legislature, get caught up in distractions and don't capitalize on solutions that may seem so simple. To me, this bill offers just that – a straightforward incentive to entice clinicians to come live and work in Maine. To take a piece of my testimony from last year, if we are serious about bringing qualified practitioners to this state, let's put our money where our mouth is.

Sign-on bonuses are not unique. In the past Kennebec Behavioral Health has advertised bonuses between \$1,000-\$7,500 for various jobs within their operations and Spurwink previously posted a \$10,000 bonus for a clinician to work with adults with mental health and substance use needs. Various other states use the same method to lure professionals in this field and we need to compete. Offering this bonus will assist an individual with the expense of moving or buying a home and could actually be what gives Maine the advantage in attracting clinicians.

Our job is to advocate for the best interests – and health and safety – of our constituents. People are desperate for help. It's no exaggeration to say people are dying because they cannot access care. Providing a financial incentive to attract and retain mental health providers is a very small price to pay when we're talking about saving lives.

I'd like to point out that last session several major stakeholders testified in support of this bill – Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative, Maine Medical Association, Maine Osteopathic Association, the Maine Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, Health Affiliates Maine, Northern Light Health, MaineHealth and Aroostook Mental Health Center. They are the experts in this field. Let's work with them to finetune this proposal.

Thank you very much for your time.