

POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT

LD 1084 Resolve to Alleviate the Behavioral Health Workforce Shortage by Allowing the Training and Granting of Behavioral Health Certifications by Community-based Agencies and Hospitals **Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services.**

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine supports the passage of the *Resolve to Alleviate the Behavioral Health Workforce Shortage by Allowing Training and Granting Behavioral Certifications by Community*. NAMI Maine advocates strongly to provide mental health care services to the 1 in 4 Mainers who are diagnosed with a mental health challenge. We also support reducing any barriers that hinder the growth of a robust community mental health system.

Before the occurrence of COVID-19, Maine was, unfortunately, recognized nationally as having a critical shortage of mental health providers. Since the onset of the pandemic, the shortage has continued to grow. The Health Resources and Services Administration, as well as Mental Health America, identify Maine as having significant deficits in the mental health workforce at many levels. Although we must ensure that professionals working with our most vulnerable individuals are appropriately trained and qualified, agencies that are trusted and licensed to deliver these services possess excellent knowledge of the necessary skills. This would help increase opportunities for individuals to enter the field, as well as encourage many young adults to return to the state.

Currently, to qualify for specific positions, the state certification for Mental Health Rehabilitation Technicians/community certification requires coursework from regionally accredited or approved programs, all of which are located within the State of Maine. Additionally, there is coursework that allows for alternative pathways of training. However, they are offered through private, contracted agencies. According to various Maine Department of Education reports, each year, 25-30% of Maine High School Graduates leave the state to attend four-year colleges. Before the state certification programs were implemented, Maine agencies were able to welcome home young adults from accredited colleges and universities across the country, train them for their positions, and provide them with work to develop a robust workforce. Upon the implementation of the state certifications, individuals began to face barriers to returning home and entering the workforce, and agencies began to accrue higher costs in training their staff. During these challenging times, we must continue to implement practical and cost-effective measures, trusting those providing the services to understand and possess the essential skills necessary for completing a job. We should also encourage our young people to return home and begin their professional journeys with as few barriers as possible.

NAMI Maine supports the work and initiatives of this committee in ensuring that critical resources and services are provided in the state. The creation of a robust workforce and the reduction of barriers to working in a rewarding yet challenging field will increase our ability to support our communities. Because of this, NAMI Maine supports the passage of LD 1084.

ABOUT NAMI MAINE: *Incorporated in 1984, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine Chapter (NAMI Maine) is the state's largest grassroots mental health organization. With support from national and regional affiliates, the agency is dedicated to building better lives for everyone impacted by behavioral health concerns. NAMI Maine engages with leaders and community partners at all levels to improve the state's mental health system through collaboration and education.*

LEGISLATIVE CONTACT

Hannah Longley, LCSW, Director of Advocacy and
Crisis Intervention
(207) 622-5767 ○ HannahL@namimaine.org

POSITIONS & POLICY AGENDA
www.namimaine.org/advocacy