

POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT**LD 1380 Resolve, Establishing the Study Group on Solutions to Address Maine's Behavioral Health Workforce Shortage****Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services**

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine supports the passage of the *An Act to Expand Maine's Health Care Workforce by Improving Educational Opportunities*. 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 initiatives to develop and expand the workforce, thereby increasing access to critical services throughout our state.

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. A point-in-time survey was conducted by the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services in Maine and the National Association of Social Workers in Maine in January and February of 2024, providing staggering statistics on the status of the behavioral health workforce in Maine. Currently, 40% of independent behavioral health providers are 60 years or older, 45% plan to retire within the next five years, and 67% plan to retire within the next ten years. These statistics are staggering and concerning the future of the mental health field and the individuals seeking support throughout our state.

The National Conference of State Legislatures has begun to outline various initiatives and programs that have resulted from work-study groups across the country. Maine takes great pride in its uniqueness; however, providing stakeholders with the means to collaborate and examine various initiatives emerging across the country and then developing appropriate and thoughtful recommendations that are practical in implementation is critical at this time. This committee has heard numerous testimonies regarding waitlists and the availability of services, with many identifying the lack of a robust workforce as a key factor in the challenges.

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 is critical in our ability to support our communities' health and well-being. Although we are aware that this will not solve all the challenges we are facing, developing a group of key stakeholders to collaborate and examine the issues will start to provide a framework of how we move forward as a whole to support our neighbors and family members. Because of this, NAMI Maine supports the passage of LD 1380.

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

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POSITIONS & POLICY AGENDA
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