



Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyers and good member of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Rachel Bousquet and I am the Executive Director of KidsPeace. I am here on behalf of my own organization and the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative – of which I am a member.

We are here in strong support of LD 1380 on behalf of the thousands of clients we serve, and more importantly for the thousands of clients we are not able to serve. It is no news flash to this committee every behavioral health agency has anywhere from a 15-30% vacancy rate for both clinicians and direct care workers. At my campus in Ellsworth, I have waiting lists for children who want and need our residential care services. Their families are desperate for help. But I also have empty beds – lots of them. These could be used to meet the needs, but I do not have the ability to staff the needs of the kids who come to us, so we have waiting lists, empty beds and as you know, we are sending our children out of state at ever higher rates because we cannot meet their needs without staff.

I want to thank Representative Stover and Senator Moore for this bill, and for making sure this is not just another “study”. We don’t need a study to tell us how bad the problem is. I see this much more as a bill that looks at and evaluates implementation plans.

We know a lot of what works. Paid internships (for both interns and the administrative costs) works. Repaying student loans works (every other state in New England does this), having on the job training for direct care workers and teaching agencies for clinicians works. The work of this group will be to evaluate these and other programs to see what will work in Maine, to do some cost-benefit analysis to see what will give us the biggest “bang for our buck” in terms of developing and maintaining a pipeline for mental health workers on the direct care and clinical workers. And they will know they have to work fast and smart, because the shortages are getting more acute every day.

We also know a lot of what doesn’t work. I know this committee has worked hard to approve rate reviews and make sense of trying to keep up. The sad truth is that many of those rates – like the ones for residential direct care workers are outdated and inadequate as soon as they come off the pipeline. And they don’t take into account other factors. For me, in Ellsworth, I lose a significant number of staff in the summer as they leave to take much higher paying summer jobs in restaurants and other tourist service jobs in Bar Harbor. As one staff member told me, “I have to leave every summer and work as a waitress so that I can afford to do this job that I love so much during the year”.

I have every confidence that this working group will focus on the right things and help all of us build and retain a workforce that meets the needs of Mainers.

I'm happy to answer any questions.

*The members of the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative are Sweetser, Inc., Opportunity Alliance, Volunteers of America, Shalom House, KidsPeace, Spurwink, Community Concepts*