

POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT**LD 1298 An Act Establishing Alternative Pathways to Social Worker Licensing
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 *An Act Establishing Alternative Pathways to Social Work Licensing*. As the state's largest grassroots mental health organization, NAMI Maine advocates strongly to work to provide mental health care services to the 1 in 4 Mainers who are diagnosed with a mental health challenge. We also support the reduction of barriers for new members of the workforce joining the profession.

Before 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 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.

By addressing the licensing guidelines, we will be able to welcome many new social workers to the field after they complete their training. Although we must ensure that professionals working with our most vulnerable individuals are appropriately qualified, standardized testing has also been proven to create inequities in the passage rates, with BIPOC and individuals from lower socioeconomic status often performing lower than their white, middle-class counterparts. Social work is a profession of humility and compassion, but it has also impacted many domains of people's lives. In a systemic review of health outcomes, the National Institute of Health found that social work-led teams yielded the most positive outcomes for individuals, with health teams with social workers as members also demonstrating higher outcomes related to preventative health, integrated health, and improving social determinants of health.¹

NAMI Maine supports the work and initiatives of this committee to ensure that critical resources and services are provided in the state. Creating a robust workforce and reducing the barriers to working in the social work field will increase our ability to support our communities. Research supports the presence of social workers, improving the overall health of the communities they serve. Because of this, NAMI Maine supports the passage of LD 1298.

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.

¹ Health Outcomes and Costs of Social Work Services: A Systematic Review - PMC

LEGISLATIVE CONTACT

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

POSITIONS & POLICY AGENDA
www.namimaine.org/advocacy