

POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT

LD 1589: An Act to Improve Parity in Insurance Coverage for Outpatient Counseling Services in Maine

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine supports the passage of *LD 1589: An Act to Improve Parity in Insurance Coverage for Outpatient Counseling Services in Maine*. NAMI Maine represents the 1 in 4 Mainers who struggle with mental health challenges each year. Mental illness is a complex journey, with individuals waiting an average of 10 years from the onset of symptoms until they seek treatment.

According to the World Health Organization, suffering from a serious mental illness has been found to reduce life expectancy anywhere from 13-32 years, depending on location and access to services. In most Western countries, WHO states that mental illness is the leading cause of disability, as well as accounting for 30-40% of sick days. Currently, suicide is the second leading cause of death for 10-24-year-olds, and it is the 10th leading cause of death across all ages. The most recent data released by the State of Maine was from 2022, with the number of suicide deaths at 277, meaning we lose a Mainer to suicide on average every 31.5 hours. The National Center for Health Workforce Analysis, 122 million Americans live in what has been designated as mental health deserts. Barriers to receiving treatment are broken into patient-level challenges, including the stigma of receiving mental health services, as well as the out-of-pocket cost associated with private insurance. Provider-level challenges include reimbursement challenges and limited scopes of practice, including licensure restrictions, as well as high levels of burnout within behavioral health providers.¹ Maine has experienced an increase in limited access to care, with reports averaging 10 months of waiting for services due to lack of availability. This results in escalation and exacerbation of symptoms. One police officer who reached out due to concerns with the system reported responding to a suicide death of an employed male with private insurance who died waiting for treatment and services, citing this as a precipitating event in his suicide note and his loss of hope.

Preventing insurance companies from arbitrarily preventing fully trained and licensed providers from providing life-saving interventions and resources will increase the availability of services for Maine citizens. Many mental health practitioners in Maine are moving towards models of self-pay only due to the inability to cover costs to cover services. By this committee moving forward stating that mental health is as important as physical health and requiring that services rendered by trained and licensed professionals should be honored, you will be sending the clear message that you support the well-being of your family, friends, and neighbors. Because of this, NAMI Maine supports the passage of LD 1589.

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 Behavioral Health Workforce 2023 Brief

LEGISLATIVE CONTACT

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POSITIONS & POLICY AGENDA
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