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Testimony of Rep. Lydia Crafts presenting

LD 1590, An Act to Reduce the Counselor and Social Worker Shortage by Amending Reciprocity Requirements for Those Professionals from Other Jurisdictions

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services

Good afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services. My name is Lydia Crafts, and I represent House District 46, which includes Bristol, Damariscotta, Monhegan Plantation, Newcastle and Nobleboro. Today, I am pleased to present **LD 1590, An Act to Reduce the Counselor and Social Worker Shortage by Amending Reciprocity Requirements for Those Professionals from Other Jurisdictions**.

This bill is the result of the mental health crisis we are in as a state. The statistics are frightening; the waitlist for outpatient mental health services is typically 8-10 months long. For specialized services – in-home care, residential services for adults and children, wait lists can be even longer. For all of these services, any denials only intensify the patient's problem, ultimately resulting in more expensive and less effective treatment in emergency rooms, homeless shelters and jails. Right now, in just two of our biggest behavioral health agencies, there are 72 clinical vacancies. 72. In just two agencies.

It is also a result of my belief as a policymaker that we have to do something to address this crisis. Given our economic reality, I'm interested in solutions that address the issue without costing the state precious resources.

Since the bill's introduction, professionals in the field have suggested additional changes. I am open to the committee considering suggestions provided in later testimony. My original idea, as represented in this bill, is to offer immediate reciprocity to anyone who is licensed in another state for any clinical position (LCP, LCPC, MFT, LCSW, LSW, LMSW) as long as they have worked for two years in the field and have no professional complaints filed against them in their current jurisdiction.

Social workers in Maine currently have a path to do just this. It is called "licensing by proclamation," although the process is not clearly outlined or easily accessible to the public. I have heard stories from people for whom it has taken six to eight months to get their license and

others who have been walked through this process and received their license in three days. I hope this bill can make this process more consistent and transparent.

I want to acknowledge the hard work of this committee on national compacts. While the compacts are promising, it is unclear when they will become effective. Improving our reciprocity process is one thing this legislature can do to address this crisis without allocating additional precious resources. I would hate for us to finish this session having done nothing to ease the workforce shortage, as it is one of the largest contributors to the mental health crisis this state faces.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions.