

POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT**LD 1590 An Act to Reduce the Counselor and Social Worker Shortage by Amending Reciprocity Requirements for Those Professionals from Other Jurisdictions**

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine supports the passage of *LD 1590: An Act to Reduce the Counselors and Social Worker Shortage by Amending Reciprocity Requirements for Those Professionals from Other Jurisdictions*. 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 to growing the behavioral health workforce in the State of Maine to increase the availability to provide life-changing and life-saving services for our communities.

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 concern the future of the mental health field and the individuals seeking support throughout our state. The depletion of our workforce has resulted in individuals reporting averages of 10 months awaiting services.

Currently, the state has what could be classified as reciprocity in place. However, the confusing language and process have created barriers to individuals entering the state and only in place for social workers. By amending the current statute that this committee previously passed to clarify reciprocity by jurisdiction as an alternative to the current endorsement by jurisdiction and expanding to include all licensed mental health professionals instead of solely social workers, we will increase the capacity of providers to shorten what is already a significant wait. With concerns regarding the delivery of evidence-based services based on existing Maine law, there could be the requirement of work for a period of time at a licensed mental health center. As an alternative to the two years of working in another jurisdiction, we could require they work two years here in Maine, supervised. On average, individuals wait 10 years from onset to symptoms to seeking treatment; providing the means for individuals to move to our majestic state with minimal barriers to working will provide lifesaving resources and support for our friends and family.

LEGISLATIVE CONTACT

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

POSITIONS & POLICY AGENDA
www.namimaine.org/advocacy

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 behavioral health field will increase our ability to support our communities. Because of this, NAMI Maine urges the committee to pass LD 1590.

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

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

POSITIONS & POLICY AGENDA
www.namimaine.org/advocacy