

132nd Legislature
Senate
of Maine
Senate District 32

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Testimony of Senator Henry Ingwersen introducing
**LD 2144, Resolve, to Establish a Working Group to Prioritize Wellness and
Mental Health Resources for Heritage Industries**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Wednesday, January 28, 2026

Good afternoon, Representative Meyer, and fellow colleagues on the Health and Human Services Committee. As you know, I am Senator Henry Ingwersen, and I represent Senate District 32, which includes Arundel, Biddeford, Dayton, Hollis, and Lyman. Today, I am very pleased to present my bill LD 2144, **“Resolve, to Establish a Working Group to Prioritize Wellness and Mental Health Resources for Heritage Industries.”**

As the Senate chair of this committee and a member of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee, I’ve had a front row seat to the ways health intersects with our heritage industries. Outside the State House, I have deep personal experiences with agriculture. In my younger years, I built a cabin and worked on a farm for decades. Over time, I developed close, strong relationships – family, friends, neighbors – who drove tractors and labored in the fields. It taught me lessons, some harder than others, that have stayed with me for a lifetime.

These days, I still live on a family farm, where I engage in beekeeping – and I grow vegetables like potatoes. I strive to plant the seeds for an interest in this important work in my grandkids who – sooner than I care to admit – will become the next generation of leaders and workers responsible for feeding people and taking care of the earth. Mine is a part-time, small-scale vocation, but I know how to get my hands in the dirt and grow fresh produce.

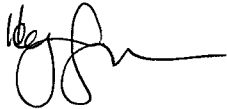
Even without those experiences, you and I know that farming, fishing, and logging are physically demanding industries. But, in general, there is less awareness of the significant mental strain on these workers, which leads to burnout, stress — or worse. It is critical that we take care of the people who help us put food on table, provide the material to build our homes, power our economy, and steward our natural resources.

As proposed, the LD 2144 would create a working group to convene and work on policy recommendations to address the mental health needs of Maine’s workers in heritage industries. It builds on conversations I’ve been engaged with since last year. In September, I attended and spoke at Maine’s first-ever Land and Sea Farmer Wellness Forum, which was rooted in the work of The University of Maine Cooperative Extension.

Recently, the Extension conducted a survey, revealing that 61% of respondents from agriculture, aquaculture, and wild-harvest fisheries identified the need for increased public education to raise awareness and reduce stigma around mental health. Suicide rates remain higher for agriculture, fishing and forestry occupation groups. I suspect that some of the contributing factors include rural health deserts, lack of mental health support, and the stigma that holds people in very independent professions back from seeking help. And, of course, many farmers and fishermen have no employer-provided health insurance. I hope that the proposed Working Group can take a closer look at these factors – and others.

Reflecting on these sobering statistics, I simply cannot sit back and do nothing while these men and women suffer in silence. When they hurt, their families hurt, too. With LD 2144, we have a real opportunity to help. Whether you work in the field or forest, or on a boat, you deserve the same compassionate, comprehensive mental health care as anyone else.

I thank the Committee for its time, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Henry Ingwersen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Henry Ingwersen

State Senator, Senate District 32

Arundel, Biddeford, Dayton, Hollis, and Lyman