



Testimony of

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**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to
LD 2144, Resolve, to Establish the Working Group to Prioritize Wellness and
Mental Health Resources for Heritage Industries**

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Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Dana Doran, and I am the Executive Director of the Professional Logging Contractors of the Northeast (PLC). The PLC is a regional non-profit educational organization that represents logging and associated trucking contractors (contractors) throughout the Northeast, predominately in the state of Maine.

As background, the PLC was created in 1995 to give contractors a voice in a rapidly changing forest products industry. As of 2021, logging and trucking contractors in Maine employed over 3,000 people directly and were indirectly responsible for the creation of an additional 2,500 jobs. This employment and the investments that contractors make contributed \$582 million to the state's economy. Our membership, which includes over 200 contractor members in the state of Maine and an additional 125 associate members, is responsible for more than 80% of Maine's annual timber harvest.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify on behalf of our membership in support of LD 2144, Resolve, to Establish the Working Group to Prioritize Wellness and Mental Health Resources for Heritage Industries.

I want to thank the Senator Ingwersen and the other co-sponsors for bringing this important bill forward this session. Logging and truck driving have been deemed by the US Department of Labor as two of the most dangerous jobs in the United States. Our membership takes this very seriously as accidents and downtime can have a direct impact upon their productivity and profitability.

The workforce in this industry also faces unique challenges such as working in isolation in some of the most remote parts of Maine, high-risk work environments such as winter operations and economic pressures that can take a toll on mental and physical health of owners and their employees. Addressing these issues is critical to sustaining this heritage industry and protecting the people doing the work in our forests.

In 2000, the PLC created a partnership with Acadia Insurance to create a culture of safety within our membership because the threat of risk was at an all-time high. In 2010, we took it a step further by offering safety trainings to our membership during mud season. This year, we will offer 12 safety trainings to our members throughout the state and over 1,000 of our members' employees. Topics for these trainings include: first aid/cpr, health for the long haul, stop the bleed, mental health, liability of driving and what to do after an accident. Training on these topics will assist our membership in understanding how critical these areas are to individual safety and to the general public.

The PLC recognized an opportunity to prioritize mental health and wellness education into our annual spring safety trainings about five years ago. First, we began working with LogAbility at the University of Maine Cooperative Extension. Our work with LogAbility has been focused on ergonomics, musculoskeletal concerns with classes that teach proper techniques for general wellness such as stretching, strap throwing, and how to fall safely. These trainings have been well-received and demonstrate the need for continued focus on wellness and mental health resources tailored specifically for loggers.

For the past three years, our organization has also teamed up with NAMI Maine to integrate mental health awareness into our spring trainings with a very positive response.

These sessions have included classes such as:

- Personal Mental Health
- Don't Stress Me Bro
- Not About You Bro

However, safety and training are expensive, and contractors are finding it harder and harder to keep up with market stresses as well as changes to the workplace to ensure their employees are safe and also have time and resources for training. As a result, we strongly support LD 2144 and feel it is an important step forward to casting light on this industry and working to provide resources for our members and their employees.

With that said, we do respectfully request an amendment to the proposed stakeholder group membership. The current language includes a seat for "one member representing the State's forestry and logging sector". We believe strongly, similar to the positions for agriculture and fishing, that the focus of this group should be on practitioners, regardless of industry. Therefore, we feel the seat should be for a representative of the "logging" sector specifically, as the challenges logging businesses face differ significantly from forestry. This change will ensure that the working group reflects the realities of those most affected.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I urge you to support LD 2144 and adopt the amendment to strengthen its impact for the logging industry.