

## **Testimony in Support of LD 2144**

### *Resolve, to Establish the Working Group to Prioritize Wellness and Brain Health Resources for Heritage Industries*

Chair Ingwerson, Chair Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is **Bob Staples**. I am the **President of the Brett M. Staples Brain Disorder Awareness Coalition**, and I am here today in **support of LD 2144**.

Maine's heritage industries—agriculture, fishing, forestry, and logging—are not just jobs. They are identities, family legacies, and ways of life. And for far too long, the **brain health realities** facing the people who sustain these industries have been treated as invisible, or simply “part of the job.”

This resolve matters because it acknowledges something critical: **stress, burnout, depression, anxiety, and suicide are not personal failures—they are predictable outcomes when high-risk work meets isolation, financial pressure, physical danger, and limited access to brain health care.**

The data cited in this bill confirms what families already know. Suicide rates remain higher in these occupations. Access to culturally competent, industry-specific **brain health care** remains limited. And stigma—especially in rural and working communities—still keeps people silent until crisis hits.

What LD 2144 does right is start with **listening**.

A working group that includes industry voices, rural health expertise, occupational safety, and brain health providers is not bureaucracy—it's **how you build solutions that actually work on the ground**. Maine does not need one-size-fits-all programs copied from urban settings. It needs approaches that respect independence, privacy, seasonal realities, and the very real fear of being labeled “unfit” if someone speaks up.

I especially appreciate that this resolve looks beyond services alone and includes **public education and stigma reduction**. You cannot expand access if people are afraid to use it.

I would encourage the committee, as this work moves forward, to ensure the working group also considers individuals living with **serious brain disorders** within these industries and families impacted by untreated or unrecognized conditions. Wellness conversations must include both prevention *and* crisis realities—because both exist side by side in Maine’s working communities.

LD 2144 does not spend money today. It does something just as important: it lays the foundation for **smart, sustainable, evidence-based brain health policy** tomorrow.

Our heritage industries have fed this state, built this state, and defined this state. The people who carry that weight deserve brain health systems that recognize their reality—not as an afterthought, but as a priority.

I respectfully urge the committee to **support LD 2144**.

Thank you for your time and your service to the people of Maine.