Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and good members of the HCIFS committee,

My name is Betsy Sweet, and I am here representing the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative (BHCC) in support of LD 2082. The BHCC consists of six nonprofit, community behavioral health organizations serving over 70% of the individuals in Maine who receive behavioral health services.

AI is undeniably a powerful and enticing tool in mental health, offering anonymity, 24/7 availability, and free access. However, it also presents significant concerns. AI chatbots operate on user-provided information, often reflecting back what users want to hear rather than what they need. Of immediate concern is that large companies and healthcare organizations, such as Wysa and Woebot Health, are increasingly adopting AI, for scalable mental health support and are marketing it widely. Unfortunately, these technologies often lack clinical validation, rigorous safety protocols, regulatory oversight, and human intervention which raises significant concerns.

Tragic incidents, such as the case of Sewell Setzer III- the teen who took his own life allegedly afrer his work with an AI "therapist", highlight the dangers of AI reliance, where the absence of human intervention led to a devastating outcome. I see it even in my own practice as a therapist where clients have reported receiving unhelpful advice from AI between appointments, emphasizing the need for human intervention in recovery.

There is a growing body of research indicating the dangers of using AI as a therapist, particularly for teenagers. A study by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) analyzed 10 publicly available AI bots using fictional case vignettes of adolescents with mental health challenges. The study found that across 60 scenarios, AI chatbots endorsed harmful proposals in 32% of cases. These results emphasize the urgent need for oversight and safety protocols.

LD 2082 seeks to address these concerns by prohibiting unlicensed AI from providing therapy services and ensuring human therapists remain in control.

While we strongly support this bill, we have a serious concern regarding the "Exceptions" section, which allows DHHS-administered programs, particularly CMS demonstration projects. This could potentially open a wide door for AI therapy, particularly affecting Medicaid clients. Given the vulnerability of Medicaid clients and the lack of proven safety protocols for AI therapy, we would ask that you eliminate this section or narrow it further.

This bill along with Rep, Gramlich's bill LD 2162, which regulates child access to human-like AI chatbots, provides complementary protection by requiring clear disclaimers and preventing marketing as substitutes for licensed professionals create comprehensive safeguards.

A last note-, Maine's LD 2082 aligns with a national movement to regulate AI in mental health services. As of February 2026, multiple states have introduced similar legislation: Indiana's HB 1201 would prohibit AI systems from impersonating licensed mental health professionals. New Hampshire's SB 640 would prohibit AI systems posing as state-licensed counselors or therapists; Tennessee's SB 1580 would prohibit systems advertising themselves as qualified mental health professionals; and Rhode Island's S 2197 specifically concerns AI use in mental health treatments. This demonstrates that Maine is not alone in recognizing this threat.

It is crucial to carefully consider the role of AI in mental health support. The evidence suggests an immediate need for caution and regulation to prioritize safety and effectiveness in mental health care. We urge you to support this bill.

Supporting Links:

- Brown University Article
- NIH Study
- https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/26/us/chatgpt-delusions-psychosis.html?unlocked_article_code=1.MlA.Z0tc.oukQ1Scdg1fR&smid=url-share
- https://www.wysa.com/
- https://woebothealth.com/
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The members of the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative are Sweetser, Inc., Opportunity Alliance, Shalom House, KidsPeace, Spurwink, Community Concepts