



Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services
c/o Christian Ricci, Legislative Information Office
Cross Building, Room 220
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: LD 1196: *An Act Regarding Targets for Health Plan Investments in Primary Care and Behavioral Health*

Dear Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler, and other members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services,

My name is Julie Schirmer. I am a resident of Falmouth and have a 35+ year history as a behavioral health educator and provider in various levels of the community mental health, medical and educational systems in Maine. I represent NASW Maine in support of Representative Zager and his eight co-sponsor's *Act Regarding Targets for Health Plan Investments in Primary Care and Behavioral Health*.

Our state has been experiencing a behavioral health pandemic. Maine ranks in the top 6 states with the highest prevalence rates of mental health disorders (MHA, 2021). During this recent COVID pandemic, depression, anxiety and substance use disorders have increased substantially and continue to rise as people become vaccinated and make plans to re-enter their communities (CDC, 2020). Over the past two decades, deaths by suicide have increased by 30% (Hedegaard, 2018). The prevalence of behavioral health conditions increases with medical conditions and are associated with poorer health outcomes, decreased quality of life, work productivity issues, disability and unemployment (CDC, 2019).

We need structures in place that can ensure our primary care system and behavioral health systems are able to screen, assess, and treat the behavioral health conditions that threaten the lives and economy of our state. Strong primary care systems are associated with improved health outcomes and cost savings. Strong behavioral health systems and behavioral health integration in primary care amplify these improvements. This bill sets expectations and provides incentives for insurers to strengthen our primary care and behavioral health systems. We need to incentivize upstream medicine available in primary care to provide care early on in a patient's illness and to prevent them from getting initial treatment at a point of no return, where costs are high and the impact on their functioning is irreversible.

For the lives and health of community members and our economy, we urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1196.

Respectfully submitted,

Julie M. Schirmer, LCSW
Co-chair, NASW Maine
Vide-president, NASW Maine Board of Directors

References:

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www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db309.htm.

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