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Testimony in Support of LD 1304, a Resolve to Establish a Task Force to Study Barriers to Achieving Behavioral Health Integration and Parity

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and Distinguished Members of the Committee on Healthcare Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services,

As a Maine-licensed Psychologist and certified School Psychologist, I am writing in support of this critical emergency legislation to establish a task force to study barriers to behavioral health treatment. At a time when there is a serious shortage of behavioral health providers a cross the state, on the heels of a national pandemic, we have an unprecedented shortage of Behavioral Health services for every sector of our population, from early childhood to the elderly.

Yet, even when a patient finds a Behavioral Health provider, their health coverage may interfere with their receiving the Behavioral Health services they need. Although I am mostly retired, I still frequently find it daunting to navigate the health care payment system, whether it be as a provider or a patient. Coverage has become increasingly hybridized, frequently involving rules from multiple entities, and/or a combination of public and private organizations. My own personal example is being a patient with Medicare Advantage, which combines a private insurer with Medicare rules. A good professional example is treating a patient with either primary Medicare or private insurance, and secondary MaineCare. Some may argue that the situation is too complicated to be dealt with by a single Task Force. In reality, the exact apposite is true, i.e., the situation is too complicated to be dealt with in a piecemeal fashion.

I am asking for your support to develop this Task Force to identify the barriers that private and public insurance programs may purposefully or inadvertently place on Behavioral Health treatment services. Only by understanding these roadblocks in Maine's insurance system can we improve access, encourage integration with primary care, and streamline our State's ability to provide Behavioral Health treatment to people of all ages. In the process, this may even help to address our shortage of Behavioral Health providers, by fixing reimbursement problems that will make practicing in Maine more attractive.

Respectfully submitted,
Michael S. Dixon, Ph.D.

