



Maine Mental Health Counselors Association

Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Finance Services
Cross Building, Room 220
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333
Attn: Edna Cayford

Dear Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and esteemed members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Finance Services,

I am writing to you today to testify and implore your judicious support of LD 1304: A Resolve, to Establish the Task Force to Study Barriers to Achieving Behavioral Health Integration and Parity.

I am Bethany Noel Leavitt, and I represent the Maine Mental Health Counselors Association, currently serving as the Legislative Chair on the Board of Directors. MEMHCA remains the only professional organization in Maine working exclusively on behalf of clinical mental health counselors, and all those we aim to serve. We represent nearly 2000 Clinical Mental Health Counselors in Maine, each holding the licensure titled: "Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor" (LCPC). An LCPC holds a Master's or Doctoral Degree and is licensed to be able to assess, diagnose, and treat mental health concerns.

MEMHCA is in unison with other large organizations representing behavioral health care professions such as NASW (National Assoc. of Social Workers, Maine Branch) and MePA (Maine Psychological Association) in recognizing the alarming need for a more integrated and streamlined behavioral healthcare system. During the current national mental health epidemic, waitlists for mental health service are reaching staggering numbers. Yet, there are many unnecessary barriers that prevent eligible individuals from becoming fully licensed to offer services, and those who are licensed face unnecessary barriers to offering services more widely. This results in a tremendous barrier for those seeking treatment to find prompt and appropriately qualified services. This leads to increased emergency (psychiatric and medical) expenses for the State of Maine, and many other public health consequences as mental health needs go unmet.

The proposed task force would allow for the implementation of a more integrated behavioral health system, hence better quality and accessibility of service for patients, and a more efficient and just system of training, licensure, and reimbursement that will keep practitioners working in the State of Maine. The proposed task force would also serve to:

- Identify and reduce barriers that are faced by those seeking to become clinicians and those who are seeking treatment, such as burdensome bureaucracy (inefficient and unduly complicated credentialing, licensing, billing procedures). This includes addressing unreasonable and severe barriers imposed by insurers upon both providers and patients.
- Reducing the fragmentation and disparity between professions regarding reimbursement policies and billing codes, as well as fragmentation between information sharing systems
- Reduce stigma and improve overall behavioral/mental health and medical outcomes.
- Reduce costs, and improve quality and access to integrative behavioral and medical care.

We are hoping to engage in what must become a strong, united collaboration to create a better quality of life for the populations we aim to serve, and the behavioral/mental health workforce in Maine and across the Nation.

Thank you kindly for your time and consideration.

In service, unity, and gratitude,

Bethany Noel Leavitt
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