



Senator Bailey, Representative Perry and the good members of the HCIFS Committee,

My name is Betsy Sweet and I am here on behalf of the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative in support of LD 2140

Maine, like many other states, is facing a critical shortage of mental health workers, social workers in particular. The demand for qualified social workers exceeds the supply, resulting in limited access to vital mental health services for both kids and adults. A recent Kaiser foundation study estimates that only 22% of Mainers who seek mental health treatment are able to access it. As one way to address this challenge, Maine should join the National Social Worker Compact, which allows social workers from out of state to practice in member states more easily.

It will help us in the following ways:

Increased Access to Qualified Social Workers: Joining the National Social Worker Compact would enable Maine to tap into a larger pool of qualified social workers from other member states. As the committee has heard, the process of obtaining a license in Maine is time-consuming and burdensome for social workers. By eliminating or streamlining these barriers, Maine can attract more professionals and ensure that its residents have access to the mental health services they need.

Addressing the Mental Health Worker Shortage: As we face the shortage of mental health workers, participating in the compact the state can broaden its options for addressing this shortage. Social workers bring crucial expertise in various areas, including counseling, therapy, and community support. The increased availability of these professionals would help reduce the burden on existing social workers and expand the reach of mental health services across the state.

Reciprocity and Flexibility: The compact offers reciprocity, which means that social workers licensed in one member state are eligible for practice in other member states without the need for re-licensure. This flexibility allows social workers to respond more effectively to local needs and emergencies, as we experienced here last October. By joining the compact, Maine would open its doors to qualified social workers who can quickly provide services during crises or assist with long-term mental health initiatives.

As employers and agencies who are working around the clock to ensure access to mental health services for all Maine residents, we believe joining the National Social Worker Compact is a crucial and relatively simple step. By expanding the pool of social workers and streamlining the licensing process

within member states, Maine can attract more professionals and benefit from their expertise, knowledge, and innovative practices. Additionally, the flexibility and reciprocity provided by the compact would enable a swift response to local needs and emergencies. By taking these steps, Maine can alleviate the strain on existing social workers, help meet the shortage of providers, and improve the overall mental health care available to our residents.

Please pass LD 2140.