

Health and Human Services Committee, attn: Kerri Withee
c/o Legislative Information Office
Cross Building, Room 214
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: LD 1135: *An Act Regarding Substance Use Disorder Treatment Services and Increasing Reimbursement Rates for Those Services*

Dear Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and other members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

We represent NASW Maine in support of LD 1135. A 2019 NASW Maine survey of 5,000 social workers revealed that low pay and low reimbursement rates for services are social workers' two highest concerns. These conditions contribute to social work shortages and other challenges in meeting client needs, particularly in more rural parts of Maine.

Notably, low reimbursement contributes directly to independent clinicians choosing not to accept MaineCare clients, decreasing access to services for clients who tend to have a higher rate of substance use disorders than the commercial-payer population. Increasing reimbursement and ensuring access to trauma-informed care are critical steps in ensuring that effective services are available and accessible.

We sadly note that in 2020, Maine had 502 fatal overdoses, surpassing the previous high of 417 in 2017. The data available for 2021 indicate a continued and alarming trend upward. According to the Maine Monthly Overdose Reports, there were 58 fatal overdoses in January and 45 fatal overdoses in February of this year. These two months each saw more fatal overdose deaths than the average of 42 deaths per month in 2020, indicating that Maine may have even more overdose deaths this year.

These data points mirror national trends that point to the COVID19 pandemic as a factor in increased overdose deaths, though Maine's drug fatalities have been trending upwards since 2014. Effective and accessible substance use disorder treatment services are more critical now than at any other juncture in Maine's history. Amending the MaineCare Benefits Manual to increase reimbursement for substance use disorder is an investment in social workers, agencies, and clients — an investment in Maine.

We urge you all to vote "Yes" on LD 1135.

Respectfully submitted,

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Exact References:

Maine Drug Data Hub:

<https://mainedrugdata.org/maine-drug-data-hub/maine-drug-data/leadership/#deaths>

Monthly Overdose Report for January 2021:

<https://mainedrugdata.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Monthly-OD-Report-for-Jan-2021.pdf>

Monthly Overdose Report for February 2021:

<https://mainedrugdata.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Monthly-OD-Report-for-Feb-2021-.pdf>