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Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine

The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers

Malory Otteson Shaughnessy, Executive Director

Testimony in Support of LD 1573

An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Study

Long-term Care Workforce Issues

Sponsored by Representative Fay

May 3, 2021

Good morning Senator Claxton, Representative Meyers, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. I am Malory Shaughnessy, a resident of Westbrook, and the Executive Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services.

On behalf of the Alliance, I am here to urge you to support LD 1573, An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues, **as well as to broaden the definition of who we call “essential care workers”.**

When this commission was established, the workers providing essential daily and weekly care for those with mental health or substance use challenges were omitted.

This was because we do not define these services as “long term care,” even though those facing the challenges of severe and persistent mental illness do have to live with their illness for a lifetime. The essential workers who, ***on a regular basis***, assist our neighbors, friends and family members with these challenges to assure that they can remain in their homes, or in residential facilities within their community – they are not in this classification. We ask that they be included.

We have learned a lot over this past year as we responded to a pandemic that impacted and disrupted so many lives and community supports. The COVID crisis has shown that even though our social safety nets are critical, they are in many ways torn and tattered. It has shown us that it is critically important to invest in promoting and building a quality essential care workforce ready to meet Maine’s care needs today, and into the future.

We must fundamentally change the way we pay for essential care services across all settings and with all populations, and create real incentives for people to take these jobs. We must create career pathways, quality supervision and supportive training. We must stop pitting providers against one another, and start valuing all of the people who provide this essential care. We must invest in livable wages and benefits.

How we raise and spend our public dollars reflects our values as a society. Sadly, our state budgets have shown that we have not valued the members of our community who need essential care, and their families, for far too long. Those community members with disabilities and behavioral health needs, those aging in our communities, and those who care for them have been undervalued, underfunded, and underappreciated.

This must change.

We urge this expansion of the definition of “essential care workers” and urge support of this legislation. Please show you value these members of our community and their caregivers and vote Ought to Pass. Thank you for your work.

*With 35 members, the **Alliance** is the state association for Maine's community based mental health and substance use treatment providers. The **Alliance** advocates for the implementation of sound policies and evidence-based practices that serve to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our behavioral health care system. All Mainers should have full access to the continuum of recovery-oriented systems of care for mental illness and substance use disorder – from prevention through treatment and into peer recovery support.*