

Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business, attn: Eva Reed  
c/o Legislative Information Office  
Cross Building, Room 202  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: LD 1785: *An Act To Address Staffing Shortages in Critical Public Safety Jobs through Economic Incentives*

Dear Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and other members of the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business,

We represent NASW Maine in support of **amending** LD 1785 to explicitly include social workers as eligible for targeted student loan forgiveness from the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME). Social workers are public health workers who provide advocacy and counseling to Maine's most vulnerable residents. Social workers are key public service workers through their work as case managers, mental health, and substance abuse providers. Their salaries are on par with the other professions listed in the bill. (Colmar, 2021).

Social work case managers tirelessly work to keep people off of the streets and out of our prison system. Access to mental healthcare has been linked to reduced violent and financially-motivated crimes (Dolea, The Brookings Institution, 2018). When you vote on this bill, please consider the following:

- **We urgently need to recruit and retain qualified social workers.** 10 of Maine's 16 counties have an identified shortage of mental health professionals, and only 50% of the state population receives adequate mental health services (University of Maine, 2021).
- **Social workers are leaving Maine due to low pay, which is not sufficient to meet rising educational costs.** Analyses indicate that social work salaries in Maine are amongst the lowest in the country (Colmar, 2019). A 2019 survey of 5,000 social workers conducted by NASW Maine found that low pay and low reimbursement rates are Maine social workers' top concerns, contributing to social work shortages and patient access issues, particularly in rural Maine (NASW ME, 2019).

Danielle has worked over three years as a Financial Aid Counselor at one of Maine's public universities, seeing firsthand the remarkable difference that forgivable loan and student loan forgiveness programs have made for Maine's students. These programs increase student and worker retention rates; improve the quality of these services by ensuring that Maine's professionals are highly qualified; and diversify skilled professions by affording disadvantaged students an opportunity to thrive.

Maine needs social workers, and social workers need Maine's financial support. I urge you to **amend the legislation to include social workers** before voting "Yes" on LD 1785.

Respectfully submitted,

Danielle Blair, MHRT/C  
NASW Policy Committee Co-Chair

Julie M. Schirmer, LCSW  
NASW President-Elect and Policy Co-Chair

Maine Chapter  
[elle.r.blair@gmail.com](mailto:elle.r.blair@gmail.com)

Maine Chapter  
[jschirme4@gmail.com](mailto:jschirme4@gmail.com)

Exact References:

Colmar, Chris. (2019) Zippia. The Ten States With Highest Social Work Salaries.  
<https://www.zippia.com/advice/social-worker-salary-by-state/>

Doleac, Jennifer. (2018). New Evidence that Access to Health Care Reduces Crime. The Brookings Institution. [https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2018/01/03/new-evidence-that-access-to-health-care-reduc es-crime/](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2018/01/03/new-evidence-that-access-to-health-care-reduc-es-crime/)

Lisnet, R., Hecker, J., Butler, S. (2021). How Can We Address Mental Health Needs in Rural Maine? The Maine Question. University of Maine.  
<https://umaine.edu/podcasts/2021/09/30/s5e2-how-can-we-address-mental-health-needs-in-rural-maine/>

NASW ME: <https://naswme.socialworkers.org/Advocacy/Action-Alerts>