

Tyler DuBois
Orono
LD 632

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Good afternoon Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business.

My name is Tyler DuBois and I am a MSW student at the University of Maine residing in Orono, here to testify in support of LD 632.

I come to you today, not just as a social worker looking to get their student loans reduced; but as a mother of 6 children, 5 with a diagnosis of autism, in a household where social workers are a huge part of the reason that any of us has the ability to thrive.

We have had many social workers on our family's healthcare teams since our first autism diagnosis a decade ago. Many of our behavioral health professionals (BHP) were social workers or earning a degree in social work; and I remember one BHP in particular stayed at my house until 1am, long past her shift would have ended, because one of my children saw bedtime as a life-threatening crisis and acted accordingly. She sacrificed many nights of good sleep to meet my child's needs. (If you want to know why this might occur in children with autism, a social worker with a child-centered, clinical focus can explain.)

Mental health concerns are only increasing with the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, especially among children. When we returned to in-person elementary school, another of my children laid on the pavement outside and refused to go into the building for months because he was so anxious about becoming sick. It was the school social worker that stood outside with him and supported him through his crisis.

In both of these situations, I needed someone acting in a professional capacity who can give the child a new narrative, separate from the parenting role. I am grateful we had skilled social workers who could take on that work. We have also been in situations where the shortage of social workers has impacted my children negatively. We have children waitlisted for therapy to help them process the stress of the last few years and the lack of care is affecting their ability to function in their day-to-day.

Anxiety and depression costs the global economy 1 trillion dollars each year.* The White House says the solution is both in timely mental health care access and in community based interventions, a solution that falls squarely in the social worker's skillset.***

The money that these teams of social workers saved the state in future healthcare costs for my children seems to far outweigh the burden of increased student loan forgiveness.

I started seeing my therapist, a social worker, when I had postpartum psychosis (PPP) after the birth of my twins. PPP is considered a mental health emergency; but the shortage of mental health care providers left me with no care until my twins were nearly three months old. The therapist in question is the reason I am in school today for social work.

Today, I emailed the financial aid office and applied for another loan to pay for this semester. Unfortunately, though I am working, I still had to make a choice between feeding my family, or taking out a loan to continue school. When I talk to some of the other social workers I know, even those that are not in school are grappling with the same dilemmas. The money that is used to fund loan forgiveness is more than just a buck saved; it honors how much love and energy social workers invest into their communities through their degrees, and makes the support that families like myself need more accessible.

I want to be a part of the supportive framework of our community and thank the committee for considering the ways it can support my doing so.

Thank you,

Tyler DuBois

*NAMI says that anxiety and depression cost the global economy 1 trillion dollars in lost revenue. <https://www.nami.org/mhstats>

*The University of Tennessee Health Sciences Center said that back in 2010, anxiety disorders in adults cost the United States nearly 49 billion dollars.

<https://dc.uthsc.edu/dissertations/370/#:~:text=The%20annual%20overall%20direct%20medical,or%20%2433.71%20billion%20in%20total.>

**The White House currently estimates the cost of mental health in this country at 280 billion dollars a year, and they explicitly state that the solution lies not just in increasing mental health care access, but in community based interventions, a solution that falls squarely within the domain of the social worker's skillset.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/cea/written-materials/2022/05/31/reducing-the-economic-burden-of-unmet-mental-health-needs/>