

Amelia Forman-Stiles
Blue Hill
LD 632

Dear Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and members of the committee.
My name is Amelia Forman-Stiles, and I live in Blue Hill. I am writing today to ask you to support LD 632.

I am graduating from University of Maine this May with my master's in social work after which I intend to join a local agency as a therapist to provide my community with much needed mental health services. There are two reasons I am urging you to support this bill—one is personal and the other extends beyond myself and my personal circumstances. I will start with the personal. I am a 45-year-old, divorced, single parent of two lovely teenagers. I moved to Hancock County twelve years ago and have both joined and created amazing community in my years here. I just bought my first home in East Blue Hill which, until it happened, seemed like an impossible dream for someone like me making below \$40,000 a year with no savings. At the age of 36 I decided to get my bachelor's degree. I started at University of Maine and finished at College of the Atlantic with a degree in Human Ecology. I started working for Aroostook Mental Health Agency as a sexual assault advocate and rural educator the same week I graduated. A year and a half later I transitioned to mobile crisis services and have been doing that for three and a half years now. Within the past three years, I entered the MSW program and now, at the age of 46, will be poised to finally have the career I am meant for as a therapist. I will have somewhere around \$140,000 in debt from my undergrad and masters combined and will likely be making around \$45,000 to \$50,000 a year. Satisfaction but not security is awaiting me on the other side of graduation. My debt, including my mortgage, will ensure that I will not at long last, break the cycle of financial fear and insecurity I have been struggling to get past all these years of single parenting and pursuing a higher education.

As for the other reason I implore you to vote yes for LD 632; I know firsthand the enormous, crippling mental health needs that exist in Maine today. Our state is grappling with an opioid epidemic, a pandemic that has tremendously impacted the mental health of our children who missed critical years of psychosocial development, our teenagers who missed critical years of social interaction and self-realization amongst peers, all the way to our elderly who suffered greatly from the isolation. The impact of this pandemic will be developing for a generation or more to come and it will be significant. We have a burgeoning aging population who will be needing social services more than ever and the societal stress of a divided country and government that impacts nearly every one of us who is paying attention. And let us not forget the poverty that so many rural Mainers are faced with.

As a crisis worker it is my job to support individuals in our communities who are struggling, to provide immediate support, assess risk and to ultimately connect them with services. Can you imagine meeting someone in their darkest hour and having to tell them that there is a 6- 9 month wait for a therapist? Even longer sometimes for a specialist? It is demoralizing and depressing and defeating. Maine desperately needs social workers so that systems can function as they are meant to, so we lose less beloved community members to substance misuse, depression, and hopelessness. Schools are struggling with unprecedented numbers of students with extreme behavioral and mental health issues, understaffed and under qualified hospitals and jails are the new holding facilities for individuals needing intensive mental health and substance use services and it isn't working. We social workers are needed.

Please, make Maine a state that social workers want to stay in, want to move to. Make it a state where social workers can do this incredibly meaningful work and thrive in their personal and financial lives- so that our communities can thrive.

I thank you for your time,

Amelia Forman-Stiles MHRT-CSP
University of Maine MSW candidate, 2023