

April 24, 2023

Testimony re: LD 1494: “An Act to Help Address the Worker Shortage in Behavioral Health Care Services by Allowing Provisional Licensure and Providing for Reimbursement for Out-of-state Licensees” – OUGHT TO PASS (Amendment)

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and honorable members of the Joint Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on LD 1494. My name is Chris McLaughlin, and I am a licensed clinical social worker with over 22 years of experience providing behavioral health services to children and families across a variety of treatment settings here in Maine. I am also humbled to be the Executive Director of the Maine Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW-ME). A large part of my job at NASW-ME is to represent the interests of Maine’s social workers as they endeavor to meet the behavioral health needs of Maine people across all settings and ages from Fort Kent to York and all places in between. On behalf of our over 1000 members here in Maine, I’m honored to share thoughts on this important proposed legislation.

We are strongly in support of LD 1494 and would ask that it be amended to specifically include social workers and our Board of Licensing. As a professional association, we hear often from social workers who are frustrated with trying to get their licenses in a timely way after they have just graduated or they are trying to move here from out of state or qualify to work in providing telehealth services from another state. The ability to get a provisional license and begin to practice while they are waiting for the official process to take place would help us retain more new social workers here in Maine after they graduate, and it would assist us in the process of recruiting more social workers to come here from out of state. Passage of this bill with the addition of social workers would provide great support to employers across Maine who are desperately trying to fill open clinician/therapist positions yet are unable to hire new Masters of Social Work graduates who are unlicensed and therefore, unable to be reimbursed by Medicaid, Medicare, or other commercial payors. It is our understanding that, even if all goes according to plan for new graduates who are exiting schools of social work across Maine and New England, the approximate time from graduation in the spring to being granted a Maine social work license is upwards of 4-5 months. Again, this assumes that all the necessary paperwork is done correctly, and that the licensee passes the national exam on the first try. Simply put, most graduates struggle with remaining unemployed for this long after graduation, and this is much too long of a time period to expect employers to financially float new hires before they are able to produce revenue for the organization.

The need for behavioral health services in our state is great, and this is one small and easy way this legislature can support the delivery of this much needed set of services. I want to thank you all for your work on this important issue. It’s important for me to also note that prior to my work at NASW-ME, I served on the Maine Board of Social Work Licensure. I have incredible respect for the Board staff and want to acknowledge the work they do each day on behalf of social workers in Maine. Our support for this legislation is not intended to be a criticism of the dedicated team of professionals at the Board. Rather, the passage of this bill would allow Board staff to continue to do their due diligence in assuring that applications are complete and managed with appropriate care while trained and competent social workers are able to get to work serving the citizens of Maine in a seamless and well supported manner. Please do not hesitate to reach out to NASW ME for any support we can offer, including any social work representation and participation in any future work sessions for LD 1494.

Thank you again,



Chris McLaughlin, MSW, LCSW
Executive Director
Maine Chapter – NASW