

Committee on Health and Human Services  
c/o Kerri Withee, Legislative Information Office  
Cross Building, Room 209  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: LD 1262: *Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services To Develop a Comprehensive Statewide Strategic Plan To Serve Maine People with Behavioral Health Needs throughout Their Lifespans*

Dear Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and other members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Julie Schirmer. I am a resident of Falmouth and have a 35+ year history as an educator and provider of behavioral health care in various levels of the community mental health and medical systems. I represent NASW Maine in support of Senator Breem and her co-sponsor's bill to *Develop a Comprehensive Statewide Strategic Plan To Serve Maine People with Behavioral Health Needs Throughout Their Lifespans*.

Although most of the focus over the past year has been on the COVID pandemic, our communities have been experiencing a concomitant behavioral health pandemic. Depression, anxiety and substance use disorders have increased substantially and continue to rise as people become vaccinated and make plans to re-enter their communities (CDC, 2020). Deaths by suicide have increased by 30% over the past two decades (Hedegaard, 2018). Maine ranks in the top 6 states with the highest prevalence rates of mental health disorders (MHA, 2021).

We need a comprehensive strategic plan to address this behavioral health pandemic to address the increased need, to support proven interventions, and to ensure that we have a well-trained workforce that provides a continuum of behavioral health care when, where and at all stages of need. The last published Maine State Health Improvement Plan had only 4 pages specifically related to behavioral health conditions (Maine CDC, 2018). DHHS and the Maine Behavioral Health Workforce Development Collaborative have produced strategic plans on substance abuse prevention and on select populations. None these are comprehensive. All are outdated and don't reflect the tremendous surge in suicide and behavioral health disorders. We have to do better.

We urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1262.

Respectfully submitted,

Julie M. Schirmer, LCSW  
Co-chair, NASW Maine  
Vide-president, NASW Maine Board of Directors



#### References:

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Hedegaard, H., et al. (2018). Suicide rates in the United States continue to increase. NCHS Data Brief No. 309. National Center for Health Statistics. Available at  
[www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db309.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db309.htm).

Prevalence of Mental Illness 2021. Mental Health America.  
<https://www.mhanational.org/issues/2021/mental-health-america-prevalence-data>

Maine State Health Improvement Plan 2018-2020. (2018) Maine Center for Disease Control.  
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Behavioral Health Treatment Needs Assessment Toolkit for States. (2013). Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.  
<https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Behavioral-Health-Treatment-Needs-Assessment-Toolkit-for-States/SMA13-4757>