

State of Maine | 131st Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services
Testimony of Emily Ferry on behalf of Maine Primary Care Association
April 25, 2023

Supporting:

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”

Sponsored by Representative Crafts

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services, I am Emily Ferry, Director of Workforce Initiatives at Maine Primary Care Association (MPCA).

MPCA is a membership organization that includes all of Maine's 20 Community Health Centers (CHCs), also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). Maine's CHCs make up the largest independent primary care network in the state, providing high quality and equitable primary and preventive medical, behavioral, and dental health services for over 200,000 people (1 in 6 Mainers) at more than 70 service delivery sites in all 16 Maine counties.

Ensuring access for behavioral health services remains a priority for MPCA and our Community Health Center Network. Maine is experiencing acute workforce shortages in many health care professions and there is a pronounced need for more behavioral health professionals, such as LCSWs/LSW-CC, LSWs and LCPCs, in our state. CHCs are doing everything they can to ensure that patients receive the quality treatment they deserve, but more help is needed to solve this growing crisis.

We support LD 1494 and thank Representative Crafts and the other co-sponsors for bringing this bill forward. Allowing a counseling professional licensed in another state to be granted a provisional license for 90 days would help mitigate barriers to obtaining licensure and allow for more workers to fill job openings throughout Maine.

In April 2023, there were 29 vacant behavioral health positions across Maine's CHC Network, which includes school-based sites. Our health centers are in dire need of professionals to fill positions such as LCSWs, LCPCs, psychiatric nurse practitioners, psychologists, and substance use disorder (SUD) counselors. It is critical that we address issues related to the recruitment of clinical behavioral health professionals to ensure that we are providing the necessary mental and physical health supports for all Maine people.

On behalf of Maine's Community Health Centers, thank you for considering our comments. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly at eferry@mepca.org with any follow up questions.

Emily Ferry, MSW
Director of Workforce Initiatives
Maine Primary Care Association