



Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine
The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers

Malory Otteson Shaughnessy, Executive Director

Testimony in Support of LD 1677

**An Act To Support Frontline Workers by Adding a
Temporary Tax Bracket Affecting High Earners**

Sponsored by Rep. Collings

May 13, 2021

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Good morning Senator Chipman, Representative Terry, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation. I am Malory Shaughnessy, a resident of Westbrook, and the Executive Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services. With 35 members, the **Alliance** is the statewide association for Maine's community based mental health and substance use treatment providers.

Even before the pandemic, years of underinvestment had left our direct care and clinical workforce underpaid, short-staffed and unable to meet the needs of all of our most vulnerable residents. We have all heard stories of children and adults with mental health needs who find themselves stuck in emergency rooms, left on waitlists, or propelled into crisis and involvement with the correctional system -- as thousands of hours of necessary care go undelivered.

These waitlists and unmet needs are tied directly to underfunding by the state. Inadequate payments to state-contracted agencies and their essential care workers have made it harder to attract the workforce we need to care for our family members and neighbors in our communities. The pandemic has only exacerbated this situation.

You have all seen the articles about increasing levels of anxiety across our country, the increasing use of alcohol and other substances, the escalating levels of overdoses and youth suicide. Experience shows us that these impacts from the pandemic will continue to ripple through our communities long after the world returns to some type of new normal.

2020 was a year like no other, but these essential care workers stuck with it. They showed up and took care of those among us struggling with challenges exacerbated by the pandemic. They wore masks and gowns, washed their hands thousands of times, put their own life on the line every day, and many did not even receive hazard pay because the agencies employing them just did not have the funds to do it.

The Alliance, along with many others, have come to the legislature time and again to advocate for legislation to increase funding for these agencies, invest more in the workers they employ throughout the state of Maine, and to expand access to services for those who depend on them. We have also time and again seen these pieces of legislation receive bipartisan support through the House and Senate...only to die on the appropriations table because we just did not have the political will to raise the funds needed. Now is the time!

By enacting this temporary tax, we can finally honor and repay not only the workers in our behavioral health sector, but all those that put themselves on the line for the greater good.

Thank you for your attention to this issue. They deserve your support – please vote ought to pass on this legislation.

*The **Alliance** advocates for the implementation of sound policies and evidence-based practices that serve to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our behavioral health care system. Our vision is that all Mainers should have full access to the continuum of recovery-oriented systems of care for mental illness and substance use disorder – from prevention through treatment and into peer recovery support.*