



128th MAINE LEGISLATURE

SECOND REGULAR SESSION-2018

Legislative Document

No. 1879

H.P. 1311

House of Representatives, March 22, 2018

An Act To Enhance and Increase the Availability of Mental Health Providers in Maine

(AFTER DEADLINE)

(EMERGENCY)

Approved for introduction by a majority of the Legislative Council pursuant to Joint Rule 205.

Reference to the Committee on Labor, Commerce, Research and Economic Development suggested and ordered printed.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "R. B. Hunt".

ROBERT B. HUNT
Clerk

Presented by Representative HANDY of Lewiston.
Cosponsored by Senator MILLETT of Cumberland and
Representatives: BEEBE-CENTER of Rockland, COOPER of Yarmouth, FARNSWORTH of
Portland, McCREIGHT of Harpswell, PERRY of Calais, TALBOT ROSS of Portland,
Senator: BELLOWS of Kennebec.

1 **Emergency preamble.** Whereas, acts and resolves of the Legislature do not
2 become effective until 90 days after adjournment unless enacted as emergencies; and

3 **Whereas,** there is an acute shortage of mental health providers in the State and
4 pressing mental health needs that affect the well-being and safety of the populace; and

5 **Whereas,** mental health providers, like many professionals, incur student debt and
6 have difficulty paying student loans; and

7 **Whereas,** in the judgment of the Legislature, these facts create an emergency within
8 the meaning of the Constitution of Maine and require the following legislation as
9 immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety; now,
10 therefore,

11 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:**

12 **Sec. 1. 20-A MRSA c. 441** is enacted to read:

13 **CHAPTER 441**

14 **MAINE MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM**

15 **§12941. Definitions**

16 As used in this chapter, unless the context otherwise indicates, the following terms
17 have the following meanings.

18 **1. Authority.** "Authority" means the Finance Authority of Maine.

19 **2. Fund.** "Fund" means the Maine Mental Health Providers Loan Repayment Fund
20 established in section 12943.

21 **3. Mental health provider.** "Mental health provider" means an individual who
22 possesses, at a minimum, a bachelor's degree from a qualified institution of higher
23 education and who practices in the State as:

24 A. A licensed social worker;

25 B. A licensed clinical social worker;

26 C. A licensed master social worker;

27 D. A licensed professional counselor, conditional; or

28 E. A licensed professional counselor.

29 **4. Program.** "Program" means the Maine Mental Health Providers Loan Repayment
30 Program established in section 12942.

31 **5. Qualified institution of higher education.** "Qualified institution of higher
32 education" means an accredited institution of higher education eligible to receive federal

1 assistance under a federal student assistance program authorized under the federal Higher
2 Education Act of 1965, Title IV.

3 **§12942. Maine Mental Health Providers Loan Repayment Program**

4 **1. Establishment.** The Maine Mental Health Providers Loan Repayment Program is
5 established to increase the number of mental health providers practicing in underserved
6 areas of the State. The authority shall administer the program and the fund.

7 **2. Eligibility.** To be eligible to participate in the program, an applicant must:

8 A. Be a mental health provider;

9 B. Have a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree related to the applicant's practice
10 from a qualified institution of higher education;

11 C. Possess an outstanding student loan relating to the degree under paragraph B;

12 D. Practice in an underserved practice area as defined in rule, including but not
13 limited to the practice of mental health care or social work:

14 (1) In a public or private child welfare or family service agency;

15 (2) In a public or private educational institution, kindergarten to grade 12;

16 (3) In a public or private hospital;

17 (4) In a public interest law service;

18 (5) In a public child care facility;

19 (6) In a public service for individuals with disabilities;

20 (7) In a public service for the elderly;

21 (8) In a public service for veterans; or

22 (9) At an organization exempt from taxation under the United States Internal
23 Revenue Code, Section 501(c)(3);

24 E. Submit an application to the authority, which must include but is not limited to
25 information concerning academic performance, awards and special honors and
26 community involvement; and

27 F. Sign a statement of intent to work as a mental health provider in an underserved
28 practice area in the State for a minimum of 5 years after acceptance into the program
29 in a form acceptable to the authority.

30 **3. Maximum amount; participants.** The authority may annually accept up to 3
31 participants from the applications submitted in accordance with subsection 2. The
32 maximum amount available to each participant is \$5,000 per year for a period of up to 5
33 years.

34 **§12943. Maine Mental Health Providers Loan Repayment Fund**

35 The Maine Mental Health Providers Loan Repayment Fund is created as a
36 nonlapsing, interest-earning, revolving fund to carry out the purposes of this chapter.

1 The authority may receive, invest and expend on behalf of the fund money from gifts,
2 grants, bequests and donations in addition to money appropriated or allocated by the State
3 and any federal funds received by the State for the benefit of mental health providers who
4 have outstanding student loans. Money received by the authority on behalf of the fund
5 must be used for the purposes of this chapter. The fund must be maintained and
6 administered by the authority. Any unexpended balance in the fund carries forward for
7 continued use under this chapter.

8 Costs and expenses of maintaining, servicing and administering the fund and of
9 administering the program may be paid out of amounts in the fund.

10 **§12944. Rules**

11 The authority may adopt rules to carry out the purposes of this chapter. Rules adopted
12 pursuant to this section are routine technical rules pursuant to Title 5, chapter 375,
13 subchapter 2-A.

14 **Sec. 2. Appropriations and allocations.** The following appropriations and
15 allocations are made.

16 **FINANCE AUTHORITY OF MAINE**

17 **Maine Mental Health Providers Loan Repayment Fund**

18 Initiative: Provides appropriations for the repayment of student loans for certain mental
19 health providers who practice in underserved practice areas and to pay the administrative
20 costs of the fund.

21

22 GENERAL FUND	2017-18	2018-19
23 All Other	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
24		
25 GENERAL FUND TOTAL	<u>\$1,000,000</u>	<u>\$1,000,000</u>

26 **Emergency clause.** In view of the emergency cited in the preamble, this
27 legislation takes effect when approved.

28 **SUMMARY**

29 This bill establishes and provides funding for the Maine Mental Health Providers
30 Loan Repayment Program to be administered by the Finance Authority of Maine. Under
31 the program, mental health providers may have portions of their student loans repaid
32 annually for up to 5 years, as long as the participants meet certain criteria, including
33 agreeing to practice in an underserved practice area for at least 5 years after acceptance
34 into the program.