



Hon. Regina Birdsell, Chair  
Senate Health & Human Services Committee  
LOB Room 101  
Concord, NH 03301

January 10, 2024

Via E-Mail: [Regina.Birdsell@leg.state.nh.us](mailto:Regina.Birdsell@leg.state.nh.us); [Kevin.Avard@leg.state.nh.us](mailto:Kevin.Avard@leg.state.nh.us);  
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RE: SB 403 - relative to health care workforce investments.

Dear Senator Birdsell and members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee:

The NH Community Behavioral Health Association (CBHA), representing the state's ten community mental health centers (CMHCs), wishes to put on the record its strong support for SB 403. We have worked with a large stakeholder group made up of many of our health care and mental health care partners, and while we support all sections of this legislation, we want to highlight the section on the State Loan Repayment Program (SLRP) and its impact on community mental health services.

Residents of our state face a critical need for mental health services. Bachelor's level staff at CMHCs play an essential role in mental health care by opening cases; providing services to help participants secure employment and stay employed; and by helping participants stay in school, maintain natural support networks, and stay housed – all elements necessary to successful recovery. However, with the expensive cost of a four-year degree, talent often leaves the mental health care system to pursue more lucrative opportunities that help them pay off school loans.

The SLRP program has been very successful in helping to recruit and retain Master's level clinicians and psychiatric nurse practitioners:

- Since the beginning, Riverbend Community Mental Health alone has had 40 participants with 7 pending; this translates to total forgiven loans of \$1.76 million with \$1.08 million currently engaged.
- Of the 17 past participants, 12 are still employed with Riverbend – an outstanding 70% retention rate.

SB 403 would do the same for Bachelor's level staff so that Riverbend and other CMHCs can recruit and retain case managers, community support workers, and residential treatment staff, keeping CMHCs competitive in the workforce and keeping community needs met.

We need people to feel they can afford to pursue advanced degrees. Relieving some of the debt from undergraduate school will encourage them to pursue advanced clinical degrees, and hopefully keep them engaged in a long-term career in community mental health. SLRP benefits our whole system of mental health care by allowing for more services at the community level, instead of hospital emergency departments or at high level of care facilities such as New Hampshire Hospital.

We strongly urge your Committee to support SB 403. We are glad to answer any questions you may have or provide additional information. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisa K. Madden, President and CEO  
Riverbend Community Mental Health