

6 April 2023

Testimony in support of LD #394:

Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Chapter 117: Rule Regarding the Duties of School Counselors and School Social Workers, a Major Substantive Rule of the Department of Education

Greetings Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Joint Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Allison Long and I live in Buckfield, Maine. I am a former public educator, a Christian, and a parent of children who attend--and adore--our local public school. I write to urge you to support the DOE's addition of Chapter 117.

Providing caring, trained, professional adults that our students can confide in, and who will work to keep them safe, is the most important function of our public schools. Not all Maine students are safe at home. Too many Maine students are not accepted and loved by their guardians. Preserving confidentiality between these students and trusted school professionals is a matter of safety--in too many cases, of life and death--for Maine children and young adults.

Maine law has required that school counselors and school social workers maintain confidentiality, with two important exceptions, since the 1980s. This is nothing new, and it is a crucial aspect of their important jobs. School counselors and school social workers are vital members of public school communities who cannot work effectively without enjoying confidentiality in their conversations with students.

Throughout my career in education, I was fortunate to work alongside many of these mental health professionals.. No one in our school community was more committed, more patient, more selfless, or more hardworking than these vital members of our staff team. School counselors and social workers are highly trained, experienced professionals, and they provide support to students who have nowhere else to turn. They literally save lives. We must make sure that they have every available tool to be successful and impactful in their work.

As a parent of public school children, I pray regularly that my children will always be safe and protected. If I were ever a reason for them to feel unsafe, unsupported, insecure, or unhappy, I hope to God they would find support at school for processing those feelings and making a plan. It takes a village to raise a child, and we are so very fortunate to have incredible public school staff in that village.

Today, you will read and hear hateful opposition to this rule change. It is imperative that the committee understands that this opposition is based on a highly coordinated campaign of willful misunderstanding intended to push a much larger agenda statewide: The defunding of public education. For the sake of Maine students, we cannot and must not let this happen. Please vote "ought to pass" for LD #394. Thank you.

Allison Long
Buckfield