

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

L.D. 2002

AN ACT TO PROVIDE INCENTIVES TO SCHOOLS THAT CONTRACT FOR CERTAIN SOCIAL WORK AND FAMILY THERAPY SERVICES

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Victoria Wallack, Director of Communications and Government Relations at Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association in support of L.D. 2002.

This bill provides badly needed grant funding to help schools contract for social workers to support students with behavioral health needs. This practice is already allowed and is utilized by some school districts.

If there are not enough providers, children end up on waiting lists, particularly in more rural counties.

An article in the *Portland Press Herald* in 2023 said there were 11 children in Washington County who had been on a list for an average of 435 days. In Penobscot County, 143 children had waited an average of 208 days.

Incentives for schools to contract social work and family therapy services can have a significant positive impact on the overall well-being of students and their families.

- It can help to provide early interventions, which is key in addressing social and family-related challenges that students may face. Schools can implement proactive measures to identify and address issues before they escalate, leading to improved overall outcomes for students.
- Investing in social work and family therapy services can lead to long-term cost savings. By addressing underlying issues early on, schools may prevent the need for more extensive and costly interventions later.
- Social work and family therapy services can contribute to creating a more inclusive and equitable educational environment. Helping school districts to prioritize these services, will help to reduce disparities in access and support from one district to the other.

Providing incentives for schools to contract for social work and family therapy services aligns with the idea that education goes beyond academics and encompasses the overall well-being of students.

This bill would provide grants to districts for contracted social work and therapy services where it is most needed, and we urge to vote in support, on behalf of children who sorely need the help.