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As a professional educator for over 30 years I have worked closely with dozens of school counselors. It is a high need profession with chronic shortages of candidates. The Educators for Maine Program is a vital initiative that supports aspiring teachers through financial assistance, ensuring a strong and dedicated workforce in Maine's education system. However, school counselors are currently excluded from this program, despite their essential role in student success. Including school counselors in this initiative would benefit not only the professionals themselves but also the students and schools they serve.

First and foremost, school counselors play a critical role in education, just like teachers. They provide academic guidance, mental health support, and career counseling—helping students navigate challenges that directly impact their learning and future success. With increasing concerns about student mental health, the need for qualified counselors has never been greater. By expanding the Educators for Maine Program to include school counselors, the state can encourage more individuals to enter this vital profession.

Additionally, many aspiring school counselors face financial barriers due to the cost of obtaining a master's degree, which is required for certification. Without financial assistance, talented individuals may be discouraged from pursuing this career, leading to a shortage of qualified counselors in Maine schools. Including them in this program would alleviate financial burdens and ensure that schools have the counseling staff necessary to support students effectively.

Some may argue that the Educators for Maine Program should remain focused solely on teachers. However, education is a team effort, and school counselors are integral to student development. Supporting them through this program would strengthen Maine's education system as a whole, benefiting both educators and students.

In conclusion, school counselors deserve the same financial support as teachers because they are essential to student success. Expanding the Educators for Maine Program to include them would help attract and retain qualified professionals, ultimately improving educational outcomes across the state. Maine should recognize the importance of school counselors and ensure they receive the support they need to continue their invaluable work.