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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

L.D. 98

AN ACT TO INCLUDE SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN THE EDUCATORS FOR MAINE PROGRAM

February 26, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Eileen King, the Deputy Executive Director for 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. 98.

L.D. 98 is a critical step toward addressing the urgent need for qualified school counselors in Maine's schools. This bill seems to add a category of educational professionals that previously had been left out of this important financial opportunity. By including school counselors in the Educators for Maine Program, this bill will provide essential financial assistance to individuals pursuing certification in this field, thereby increasing the pipeline of professionals dedicated to supporting our students' academic and emotional well-being.

The role of school counselors has never been more important. Our schools are grappling with increasing student mental health needs, academic pressures, and post-secondary planning challenges. Yet, many districts, particularly those in rural and underserved areas, struggle to recruit and retain licensed school counselors due to financial barriers associated with certification and student loan burdens. L.D. 98 will help alleviate this challenge by incentivizing talented individuals to enter and remain in the profession.

I urge the committee to pass L.D. 98 and support the educators and counselors who are essential to our schools and communities. Thank you for your time and consideration.