

Testimony in OPPOSITION to LD 828, An Act to Allow Chiropractors to Be Designated as School Health Advisors

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and esteemed members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is John Diefenderfer, DO, and I am submitting testimony on behalf of myself, a member of the community of Hallowell, Maine, and an osteopathic physician with training in family medicine, sports medicine and osteopathic neuromusculoskeletal medicine. I am in opposition to LD 828, which would allow school boards to appoint chiropractors to act as school health advisors.

As an osteopathic physician, I recognize the value of alternative therapies and the importance of a holistic approach to health and well-being, particularly in a school setting where children's physical, emotional, and mental health are critical. However, I have significant concerns about chiropractors having a health advisory role in public schools.

Osteopathic medicine, like chiropractic care, emphasizes the interconnectedness of the body's systems, but the training and approach of osteopathic physicians is far more comprehensive. As DOs (Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine), we receive extensive medical education that includes not only musculoskeletal care but also in-depth training in all aspects of medicine—diagnosis, treatment, prevention, and management of a wide array of medical conditions. In addition, we are licensed and trained to prescribe medications, perform surgeries, and provide medical care.

Chiropractors, on the other hand, typically focus on spinal manipulation and musculoskeletal issues. While I recognize that spinal health is important and chiropractic care may be beneficial for certain conditions, their training is generally limited in comparison to the broad scope of medical education that an osteopathic or allopathic physician receives – an indeed limited in comparison to nurse practitioners as well. Chiropractors are not trained to handle the full spectrum of health concerns that can arise in a school setting, which includes infectious diseases, chronic health conditions, mental health, and developmental issues—areas where medical professionals are essential.

While chiropractors can certainly contribute valuable insights in musculoskeletal health, their involvement in broader health advisory roles within schools could potentially undermine the role of trained medical professionals who possess the broader expertise required to manage the overall well-being of children. Schools should prioritize evidence-based practices, which are often grounded in comprehensive medical training and clinical experience, when making decisions about healthcare in school settings.

As a physician who believes strongly in the integration of body, mind, and spirit in healing, I believe that children would be better served by health advisory roles filled by professionals who have the extensive, well-rounded training required to address the diverse range of health concerns that arise in a school environment. While I support the use of complementary therapies within a medical framework, these should be applied with proper oversight and in conjunction with, not in place of, conventional medical care.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

John Diefenderfer, DO

Concerned Citizen of Hallowell, Maine