

Testimony in Support of LD 1203
Mental Health Services for Maine Students

Senator Joseph Rafferty, Representative Kelly Murphy, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Jeri Stevens PhD, LCPC. I am a licensed clinical professional counselor (LCPC), and Clinical Supervisor for school counselors and school-based clinicians. I have worked in the school and mental health field since 1979 and am currently the Co-President of Maine Mental Health Counselors Association (MeMHCA). I am writing to strongly encourage your support for LD 1203.

School (guidance) counselors are employed to support all typically developing students, as well as those experiencing mild to moderate mental health challenges. School-based clinicians provide services to students facing more severe mental health issues that impact their academic performance.

Many colleagues have presented evidence of workforce shortage. Community agencies and private practitioners have long waitlists for counseling services. Anxiety, depression, loneliness, suicide rates, and substance use issues are rising, while mental health services for youth are rapidly declining.

Providing these services during the school day is not only logical for consistency but also ensures immediacy. Instead of waiting for months in distress and potentially making poor choices, students can receive timely assistance and are more likely to make healthy decisions.

Please support LD 1203. It is crucial to the school environment and the future of our students.

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