

Testimony in support of LD 858, An Act to Ensure Behavioral and Mental Health Services Are Available to Students by Providing Grants to Schools That Contract for Those Services.

April 8th, 2025

Thank you, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished Committee Members for this opportunity to speak in support of LD 858, An Act to Ensure Behavioral and Mental Health Services Are Available to Students by Providing Grants to Schools That Contract for Those Services.

My name is Nathana McGivney. I been a Licensed Clinical Social Worker for 19 years and a Director at Spurwink Services for the past 14 years. It is widely recognized that the mental health needs of Maine's children have never been greater. Yet for the first time in my career, I cannot advise someone where they can find a therapist for a child who has Mainecare. Many agencies and therapists no longer accept Mainecare, and those that do have extremely long waitlists or closed waitlists, especially for children. If this issue is not swiftly addressed our schools and our state will be facing a youth mental health crisis of even greater cost and proportion.

For the past 30 years Spurwink has partnered with public schools to provide colocated mental health counseling services within the school setting. This is a highly effective, low-barrier, way for Maine children to access mental health and crisis intervention services. Therapists serve as a tremendous asset to teachers and administrators struggling with student behavioral and emotional challenges, and work with parents and caregivers to provide parenting education, family therapy, and help connect them with needed resources. This model ultimately results in less adverse childhood experiences and better and less-costly long-term outcomes.

As an example: one of our therapists is working with a second-grade student being raised by her father. She has had no contact with her mother since infancy due to her mother's substance use and child welfare concerns. While this child is very bright academically, she has exhibited highly disruptive classroom behaviors. She would become upset and lash out at her peers and teachers. The school-based therapist developed a caring and supportive relationship with this child, worked with her to learn and practice healthy self-regulation and coping skills, and to process the sadness and anger she felt about her absent mother. The therapist partnered with the classroom teacher and school to better understand the child's triggers and needs and participated in development of a behavior intervention plan to help the student be more successful at school. The therapist also worked with the child's father, helping him better understand child development and learn positive parenting strategies. The therapist then helped bridge the previously tense relationship between the father and the school. Today this student's school behavior is dramatically improved. Teachers and administrators feel much more equipped to support her. The young girl and her father report this intervention has strengthened their relationship.

Unfortunately, after years of increasing deficits, Spurwink has been forced to scale back our public-school counseling program by not filling vacant positions or adding new school partners. Current reimbursement rates have led to program losses that are unsustainable. Other agencies providing therapy for children with Mainecare are facing similar challenges and have taken similar measures. This heartbreaking scenario translates to thousands Maine's most vulnerable children and families unable to access preventative behavioral health treatment before their symptoms and needs increase. I respectfully request that you support LD 858 so children in need can receive critical behavioral health services. I am available if you have any questions.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Nathana McGivney, LCSW, CCS (she, her, hers)
Regional Director Outpatient and Community Services - Cumberland County
nmcgivney@spurwink.org

