

Melissa Walshe
Spurwink
LD 858

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty and Representative Murphy and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Melissa Walshe, and I am a resident of Lisbon Falls.

I am here today to speak to you regarding 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.

I work in a school as a public school clinician through Spurwink. I work with k-5 students, providing in-depth clinical services that are beyond the scope of what school social workers and school counselors have the time and resources to provide. In most cases, parents and clients give permission for me to coordinate closely with the school. I volunteer as much time as I can coordinating with the school social worker, the school counselors, the administrative staff, nurses, ed techs, and teachers. This gives me a very rich view of what's going on with children who often don't have the words to explain overtly what they need support with. It positions me to act as an advocate when necessary and improves my ability to help clients learn how to advocate for themselves. It gives me data to help children develop perspective taking and accountability.

Being in a school also provides me a unique way of being a reliable part of a child's routine. Parents often struggle to take time off work to help children access weekly counseling services: being in a school allows me to be there for children regardless of the adult scheduling concerns that can interfere with consistent attendance. This helps me build the trust that is so essential to an effective therapeutic relationship. It is my opinion that having clinical counselors placed in schools reduces the financial and time strain on parents, increases reliability of care for children, improves efficacy of clinical services for children, and supports coordination of care strategies between home and school. LD 858 makes contracting with mental health professionals more feasible for schools, and I support it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.