

Written Testimony for LD 1203 & LD 858

April 6, 2025

Dear Members of Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is **Roy Ulrickson III, LCSW**. I live in Newport and am a father of 2 neurodiverse children, I am testifying on behalf of the Autism Society of Maine (ASM) Board of Directors as the Treasurer. I have been working in the field for over 15 years as a former paraprofessional in the public-school setting and long-term provider of in-home mental health services. I am testifying in favor of **LD 1203: An Act to Ensure Behavioral and Mental Health Services Are Available to Students by Providing Grants to Schools That Contract for Those Services** and **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 have worked in the public elementary school setting from pre-K to grade 5. I also have several teachers in my extended family. Each one of them will tell you their number one challenge in classroom management. It was quite evident from my time supporting children in school that most of the behavior issues resulted from mental health issues or were trauma responses.

Research has shown that many mental health and behavioral challenges that lead to disruptive behaviors are trauma related. Adverse childhood Experiences (ACEs), childhood traumas, include verbal, emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect. Common symptoms of early childhood trauma as a result of this abuse include:

- Acting out in social situations
- Imitating the traumatic event
- Being verbally abusive
- Poor impulse control
- Self-destructive behavior
- Oppositional behavior

Using punitive approaches to these behaviors does not do anything to help these children. In fact, it usually lead to re-traumatization! It is imperative for educators to understand the effects of trauma and mental health issues to appropriately support these children.

Research has also demonstrated that the earlier the trauma and mental health challenges are addressed, the better the long-term outcome for children. This leads to improving academic results across the individual's school career.

In my personal and professional opinion, understanding the needs of neurodiverse populations is crucial to understanding and supporting all students in the classroom. Neurodiversity refers to a brain that functions differently from the typical or "neurotypical" brain, embracing the natural variation in how individuals perceive the world differently. Neurodiverse diagnoses include but are not limited to autism, ADHD, IDD and Dyslexia. Therefore, any organization chosen to support schools and children must demonstrate an understanding of these diagnoses in order to provide evidenced based interventions.

Every student comes to class with a diverse set of challenges, strengths and an individualized perception of their world. It is also likely that they come to school with a history of trauma. Soft skills: effective communication skills, understanding peers, problem-solving, adaptability, and time management, are often more important than a student's understanding of the material. These skills help students better understand concepts, engage more in the classroom and deepen their learning. Effective mental health and behavioral support can improve these skills in students. An emotionally regulated child is one that can engage in the classroom and with the teacher and learn new skills. This is exactly why I strongly support the passage of LD 1203 and LD 858.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Roy Ulrickson III, LCSW
Father of Roy "Andrew" Ulrickson IV and Thomas Ulrickson
Autism Society of Maine Treasurer