



Maine Education Association
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**Testimony
In Support of
LD 1203: An Act to Provide Grants to Schools That Contract for Behavioral and Mental Health
Service
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.
April 8, 2025**

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

My name is Mallory Cook, and I have the pleasure of serving the nearly 24,000 members of the Maine Education Association as the Director of Training and Early Educator Engagement. I am here today to testify in support of both LD 1203: An Act to Provide Grants to Schools That Contract for Behavioral and Mental Health 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.

Today, mental health providers in our state have highlighted the reduction in services available to our school districts, even as our students need these services now more than ever. One key indicator of student mental and behavioral health is how they perform and act at school. Data from the Department of Education's ESSA dashboard reveals trends that underscore the necessity for increased mental health support for our students. Included below are the violent incidents with and without injuries reported between 2018 and 2024 in Maine schools; however, it is important to note that not all districts reported data, some for 5 years or more, so these numbers are likely higher than what is portrayed here.

School Year	2018-2019	2019-2020 (August to March)	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Violent Incident with Injury	447	550	690	763	735
Violent Incident without Injury	1,799	1,806	2,293	2,526	2,470

In some districts, the data tells a much more alarming story. The violent incidents without injury show an increase of 113 incidents between 21-22 and 23-24.

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Single Rural District

School Year	2018-2019	2019-2020 (August to March)	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Violent Incident without Injury	23	28	6	25	119

Furthermore, MEPRI's 2025 report, which will be shared in more detail with the committee on Monday, "K-12 Educator and Administrator Experiences Managing Student Behavior in Schools" reported that 52% of Maine educators had experienced crisis behaviors in the 23-24 school year, 70% managing crisis behavior monthly. Administrators in the report identified insufficient access to mental health services as a barrier to responding to these incidents. (MEPRI, 2025) In addition to this survey, MEA also surveyed nearly 3,000 members, learning that 95% of members believe student mental health to be a serious issue, 89% believe student behavior to be a serious issue, and 86% believe a lack of social workers and mental health supports to be a serious issue.

Upon the passage of LD 6555, the Dangerous Behavior Prevention and Intervention Law in 2019, MEA members attended and continue to attend training in droves, simply because they want to support the physical and emotional well-being of the students and staff in their buildings; however, what is needed is more wraparound supports for students' mental and behavioral health. We can begin to accomplish this through the grants established in these bills, which bring the services to schools, eliminate logistical barriers for families, and fill the gaps where schools do not have the personnel to meet student needs.

Hermon High School, where I worked before taking on this role, is a great example of how schools need contracted support. The school employed three school counselors and had one social worker, who was shared across the district. As student needs became more complex, the district contracted a clinician from Acadia. Her caseload was full, with a waiting list within her first day. When speaking with the principal this weekend, they are still contracting for those services without a let up on clients and an extensive waiting list. This aligns with data from the Department of Health and Human Services which notes that 422 Maine children are waiting for behavioral and mental health services (MDHHS).

While addressing the mental health challenges we are facing in our schools will require a multi-pronged approach, MEA strongly believes that significant investments in behavioral and mental health services are critical in maintaining environments that are safe and conducive to learning, which is why we urge the committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1203 and LD 858.

Thank you, and I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.

Maine Department of Health and Human Services & Maine Department of Education. (2023). *Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey: Maine High School Detailed Tables*. Retrieved from https://www.maine.gov/miyhs/sites/default/files/2023_Reports/Detailed_Reports/HS/MIYHS2023_Detailed_Reports_HS_State/Maine%20High%20School%20Detailed%20Tables.pdf

Maine Education Policy Research Institute. (2025). *Maine K-12 Educator and Administrator Experiences Managing Challenging Student Behavior in Schools*. Retrieved from [MEPRI-Report-on-Challenging-Student-Behavior-March-2025.pdf](#)