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TO: Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
FROM: Maine Principals' Association Legislative Committee
RE: In Opposition of LD 1203: An Act to Provide Grants to Schools That Contract for Behavioral and Mental Health Services

In Opposition 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

DATE: April 8, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Dr. Holly Blair, and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Principals' Association – Professional Division. The MPA represents more than 700 PreK-12 principals and assistant principals, CTE Directors and Assistant Directors, and Athletic Directors of public and private schools in Maine.

The Maine Principals' Association's Legislative Committee is opposed to these two bills, We do, however, want to acknowledge and commend the Legislature for recognizing the urgent and growing need for behavioral and mental health services in our schools. The intent behind these bills is deeply appreciated, and there is no doubt that students across Maine—from Pre-K through 12th grade—require greater access to these essential supports. Students, families, and educators alike are calling for increased mental health resources, and we support this call to action.

However, while the intent is admirable, the structure and implementation of LDs 858 and 1203 raise several concerns, particularly regarding equity, sustainability, and effectiveness.

1. Concerns with the Competitive Grant Model

These bills propose a competitive grant program funded through the General Fund. A competitive model, by design, creates winners and losers. While some schools may benefit, others—perhaps equally or even more in need—could be left without support. This inequity is especially concerning for rural and underserved schools, which may lack the administrative capacity or grant-writing expertise needed to compete for funding, despite facing significant challenges.

2. Equity and Sustainability

Mental health needs in schools are widespread and continuous. Addressing them through a limited and competitive grant process may not provide a stable or long-term solution. Funding such a program through the General Fund raises

concerns about sustainability and potential trade-offs with other essential services. We believe mental health support should be equitably accessible to all schools, not dependent on the outcome of a grant application.

3. Workforce Capacity and Geographic Barriers

Even if funds are awarded, geographic disparities and workforce shortages pose a significant barrier. Many regions of Maine— especially rural and remote areas— lack the behavioral health professionals needed to deliver services. Without a parallel investment in workforce development and system infrastructure, additional funding may not translate into actual care for students in these areas.

While we strongly support efforts to expand mental health resources in schools, we cannot support LD 858 and LD 1203 as currently structured. These bills risk creating inequities and do not provide a sustainable or comprehensive approach to ensuring mental health support for all Maine students.

We respectfully urge the Committee to oppose LD 858 and LD 1203, and instead work toward solutions that ensure equitable, reliable, and statewide access to behavioral and mental health services—without forcing schools to compete for limited resources.