



**Written Testimony of the Maine School Counselor Association
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
Submitted to the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee
Date: Tuesday April 8, 2025**

On behalf of the Maine School Counselor Association (MESCA), which represents over 300 school counselors and education professionals across the Great State of Maine who work every day to support the academic, career, and social-emotional development of Maine's students.

MESCA strongly supports 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." We believe this legislation is an essential step toward addressing the growing mental health needs of students in our schools.

As school counselors, we are on the front lines of student mental health. In recent years, we have seen a marked increase in the number of students struggling with anxiety, depression, trauma, and other behavioral health concerns. While school counselors provide crucial support, our scope is broad, and we are often stretched thin. Many of our students need more intensive and specialized mental health services than we are licensed to provide.

LD 858 provides a thoughtful solution by establishing a grant program through the Department of Education that allows school administrative units to contract with licensed behavioral and mental health providers. Importantly, the bill ensures these funds are used to supplement—not supplant—existing school-based mental health staff, preserving the integrity of our current teams while expanding capacity to meet student needs.

We also commend the bill's provision that grant funds may only be used for services not covered or reimbursable by MaineCare. This ensures that the program targets gaps in service and supports all students who might otherwise fall through the cracks due to coverage limitations or provider shortages.

By allocating funding based on school population and providing ongoing financial support starting in FY 2025-26, this legislation offers a practical, equitable framework for scaling services across the state.

The Maine School Counselor Association urges the Committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 858. Investing in the mental and behavioral health of our students is not only the right thing to do—it is essential for their academic success, emotional well-being, and long-term development into healthy, productive members of our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Rebecca Edelman PhD, Chair
Scott Harris, EdS. Past Chair
Deborah L. Drew, EdD. Advocacy Committee
Maine School Counselor Association