



**Written Testimony of the Maine School Counselor Association
In Support of LD 1203: An Act to Provide Grants to Schools That Contract for Behavioral and Mental Health Services
Submitted to the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee
Tuesday April 8, 2025**

On behalf of the Maine School Counselor Association (MESCA), which represents over 300 school counselors and educators that are working in every corner of the Great State of Maine to support the academic, social/emotional, and career development of Maine's students.

The Maine School Counselor Association strongly supports **LD 1203**, "An Act to Provide Grants to Schools That Contract for Behavioral and Mental Health Services." This legislation provides a practical and meaningful pathway for schools to meet the growing and urgent mental health needs of their students.

Every day, school counselors witness the mounting challenges that students face—anxiety, depression, trauma, grief, and more. While school counselors play an essential role in supporting students' mental wellness, we are not licensed to provide the clinical services many students require. Further, the demand for care increasingly exceeds what existing school-based personnel can manage.

LD 1203 addresses this need by establishing a grant program within the Department of Education that supports school administrative units in contracting with licensed behavioral and mental health service providers. The funding structure helps ensure that schools can access the professional help their students need.

We support how this bill is carefully crafted to: ensure grant funds are used for services not already reimbursable through MaineCare. Prevent the supplanting of existing school-based mental health staff, and the Direct funding based on a school administrative unit's need for clinicians—an equity-centered approach.

These provisions demonstrate thoughtful stewardship of resources and a clear commitment to strengthening school-based mental health systems without undermining existing personnel or duplicating services.

As school counselors, we know that when student mental health is supported, they are more present in class, more engaged in learning, and more likely to succeed in school and throughout their life. LD 1203 provides the kind of targeted support that will make a real, lasting difference for Maine's youth.

We respectfully urge the Committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1203. Thank you for your dedication to Maine's students and for your attention to this critically important issue.

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