

MAINE PRINCIPALS' ASSOCIATION



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TO: Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
FROM: Maine Principals' Association Legislative Committee
RE: In Support of LD 1398: An Act Regarding Behavioral Health Support for Students in Public Schools
DATE: April 23, 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 800 PreK-12 principals, assistant principals, CTE directors and assistant directors of public and private schools in Maine.

The MPA Legislative Committee is in support of LD 1398. This bill represents a meaningful and much-needed step toward strengthening the behavioral health infrastructure and overall staffing in our public schools. We are especially supportive of the provision that calls for having a licensed clinical mental health provider or school counselor on staff in each school. As educators and school leaders, we see firsthand the increasing mental health challenges faced by our students, and we recognize the critical role that trained professionals play in addressing those needs.

We also strongly support the proposed reduction of the student-to-counselor ratio to 250:1, which is consistent with national best practices in student support services. This ratio would allow school counselors to better serve students proactively, offering not only crisis response but also the preventive care and academic, social, and emotional guidance that are essential for student success.

We further appreciate the bill's effort to establish recommended staffing ratios—to be implemented by the 2028–2029 school year—for a wide range of essential school personnel. These include librarians, media assistants, school health professionals, administrative support, and clerical staff. Each of these roles contributes significantly to a safe, supportive, and well-functioning school environment.

However, while we support these goals, we must acknowledge the practical challenges that schools may face in implementing them. Many districts across Maine are already experiencing workforce shortages, particularly in areas such as school counseling, nursing, and support services. These shortages pose a hurdle to meeting the proposed staffing standards within the outlined timeline.

By passing this bill, the adjusted financial support through the Essential Programs and Services (EPS) funding model would reflect these staffing priorities, and schools would be better positioned to recruit and retain the qualified professionals needed to meet these standards and support student well-being effectively.

LD 1398 is a thoughtful and forward-looking piece of legislation that responds to the evolving needs of Maine's students and school communities. By investing in the behavioral health and staffing infrastructure of our schools, we are investing in student success, safety, and well-being.

We thank you for your leadership on this critical issue and urge you to support LD 1398, while also considering the necessary funding and workforce development strategies that will make these goals achievable across all Maine schools.

Please note that this testimony was submitted based off of the original language of the bill and not additional amendments that may be presented.