

Written Testimony for LD 1097

Dear Representative Murphy, Senator Rafferty and the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is David Sharp and I am testifying on behalf of the Autism Society of Maine (ASM) Board of Directors. I am testifying in favor of LD 1097: An Act to Provide De-escalation and Behavior Intervention Training for School Personnel.

I am writing in favor of passing LD 1097 due to the ever increasing social, emotional and behavioral needs of school aged students. I have seen the need for this vital legislation both personally and professionally.

Personally, having a child with neurodiverse needs I have had to utilize many different de-escalation techniques to meet the social, emotional and behavioral needs of my child. Knowing when, where and how to the proper techniques needed to provide a safe and calming environment has been crucial to my child's growth. Learning these techniques emanated from my training that I received as an educator.

Professionally, I have been a certified special education and general education teacher for over a decade. I have had the benefit of being a certified trainer in de-escalation and behavioral interventions in my school district for many years. I was directly certified to become a trainer from a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) which was beneficial given that a BCBA has the specific training and certifications to provide behavioral assessments and interventions. This has provided me an opportunity to directly train many staff members in these methods and to teach them the techniques needed to safely manage student behaviors. I have witnessed on countless times the effectiveness of the taught methods.

Through training a large portion of the special education staff in my school district it has provided the staff and students critical crisis management training. Providing the staff with this training provides professional development that is used everyday with a wide range of students to effectively minimize, manage and often times prevent behaviorally challenging situations.

Training the staff with proven and effective methodologies not only provides the staff with knowledge and confidence but the students receive the care they need with dignity and safety. By having specific and proven training that is mandatory to all school staff will only yield positive outcomes for students because school staff will be able to be trauma-informed and focused on modifying behavior to prevent dangerous outcomes.

An example of a similar current legislation is The State of California's adoption of Chapter 5.5, 56520-56525 for the purpose of defining the use of behavioral interventions in schools. One aspect of this legislation is 56524 - Teacher Training Requirements. It directs the Superintendent to collaborate with higher education institutions and the Commission on Teacher Credentialing to ensure adequate training in behavioral interventions for educators. (source- <https://hello.qbs.com/legislation-ca-doe>)

One aspect that should be established is how this legislation will be funded. Will the legislation be fully funded via the state budget or will each school administrative district be expected to incorporate this into the yearly budget? The importance of this legislation can not be stated enough but given the economic landscape of the budgets have clarity on the funding needs to be transparent.

Knowing the current legislation exists in other states and that there are proven and effective methodologies and programs available will hopefully encourage the passing of legislation in Maine. The social, emotional and behavioral growth of all school aged children are just as important as their academic growth to assist them in becoming productive citizens.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

David Sharp
Board of Directors
Autism Society of Maine