



April 23, 2025

Testimony Regarding LD 1398: An Act Regarding Behavioral Health Support for Students in Public Schools

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

We are writing on behalf of the Maine Psychological Association (MEA), a non-profit association that represents the 700+ psychologists and psychological examiners in Maine. Our mission is to advance psychology as a science, as a profession, and as a means of promoting human welfare. Our membership consists of practicing psychologists, psychological examiners, academicians, researchers, students, and others who are invested in the science and practice of psychology in Maine.

Approximately one in five children and adolescents in the United States meet criteria for a mental disorder each year¹, and 35.3% of Maine children and adolescents have an identified mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral problem². Mental and behavioral health is associated with academic achievement and positive life outcomes; yet many Maine children and adolescents do not have access to effective services. Comprehensive school-based mental and behavioral health services are critical for mitigating service access barriers, promoting learning, and helping Maine students thrive. Therefore, we are writing to encourage the Committee to consider amendments to this bill to ensure that it provides the comprehensive mental and behavioral health resources that Maine students need.

MePA fully supports establishing appropriate ratios for school-based mental health providers, but we are concerned that this bill omits a definition and ratio for school psychologists. Federal law, specifically 20 U.S.C. 7112(6), defines credentialed school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers as school-based mental health providers; yet the Maine educational system often fails to recognize school psychologists in this capacity.

The unfortunate result is that school psychologists—inclusive of certified specialist-level and doctoral-level providers, some of whom are licensed psychologists—experience significant role restrictions in Maine schools. Maine's school psychologists allocate most of their time to conducting special education eligibility evaluations and carry significantly higher evaluation caseloads than their peers nationally. School psychologists nationwide conduct an average of 55 evaluations per year³, whereas school psychologists in Maine conduct an average of 70 evaluations per year⁴. This represents a concerning underutilization of school psychologists, as their training prepares them to play a significant role in the development, delivery, and evaluation of school-based mental and behavioral health services. We have attached a position statement and a white paper from the National Association of School Psychologists to provide additional information about the scope of mental and behavioral health services that school psychologists are qualified to offer.



This issue of role restriction is compounded by the fact that the state of Maine is facing a significant shortage of school psychologists. During the 2022-2023 academic year, Maine schools employed one school psychologist for every 1,705 students⁵. This significantly exceeds both the recommended ratio of 1:500 and the 2022-2023 national average ratio of 1:1119. Addressing this shortage is critical for expanding school psychologists' roles in Maine, and research shows that smaller school psychologist to student ratios are associated with a higher likelihood of providing comprehensive school-based mental and behavioral health services⁶.

Over the past 5 years, the state of Maine has invested significant efforts to increase its numbers of credentialed school psychologists. However, Maine's local educational agencies are unlikely to take action to expand school psychology services unless school psychologist-to-student ratios are established by regulation and supported through appropriate allocation of state funding.

It is for these reasons that we strongly advocate for an amendment to this bill to establish appropriate ratios of school psychologists to students in Maine. We believe that setting reasonable ratios for all school-based mental and behavioral health service providers—clinical mental health providers, school counselors, and school psychologists—is necessary for the well-being of Maine's students. If you have any questions about our testimony or the resources we have submitted, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Respectfully,

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¹ Bitsko, R. H., Claussen, A. H., Lichstein, J. et al. (2022). *Mental health surveillance among children – United States, 2013-2019* (Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, Vol. 71, No. 2). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/su/pdfs/su7102a1-H.pdf>

² Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. (2022). *National survey of children's health (NSCH)* [Data query]. Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health. <https://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey>

³ Farmer, R. L., Goforth, A. N., Kim, S. Y., Naser, S. C., Lockwood, A. B., & Affrunti, N. W. (2021). Status of school psychology in 2020, part 2: Professional practices in the NASP membership survey. *NASP Research Reports*, 5(3).

⁴ Russo, E., & Pratt, J. L. (2024). *Maine school psychology survey*. Manuscript in preparation.

⁵ National Association of School Psychologists. (2024, February). *State shortages dashboard*.

⁶ Eklund, K., DeMarchena, S. L., Rossen, E., Izumi, J. T., Vaillancourt, K., & Rader Kelly, S. (2020). Examining the role of school psychologists as providers of mental and behavioral health services. *Psychology in the Schools*, 57(4), 489-501. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22323>