

April 22, 2025

100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Testimony of Regina Bowie

In Support of LD 1097 – An Act Regarding Behavioral Health Support for Students in Public Schools And LD 1248 (formerly 1398) – An Act to Provide De-escalation and Behavior Intervention Training for School Personnel

Referred to the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Presented by Representative MURPHY of Scarborough. Cosponsored by Senator RAFFERTY of York and Representatives: CLOUTIER of Lewiston, CRAFTS of Newcastle, DODGE of Belfast, KUHN of Falmouth, MOONEN of Portland, Senator: PIERCE of Cumberland

Good [morning/afternoon], Senator [Chair], Representative [Chair], and members of the Committee,

My name is Regina, and I am a self-advocate and a proud member of Speaking Up For Us (SUFU). I am here today to speak in support of LD 1097 and LD 1248, which aim to increase behavioral health support and proper de-escalation training for school staff.

Let me ask you: how would you feel if someone touched you on the back, or grabbed your wrist or hand to guide you somewhere, especially if you were having a bad day? That might not seem like a big deal to some, but without the right training, that kind of contact can feel more like a physical restraint than support. It can be scary and make the situation worse.

I don't have a personal story of being physically restrained as a child, but I've seen a lot of situations where things escalated because the staff didn't have the right training. I've seen restraint situations go badly—where someone gets hurt, or the person trying to help actually makes things worse because they didn't know how to handle the behavior in a safe and calm way.

These bills are important because they will help prevent those situations. Specialized training in de-escalation is not just helpful, it's necessary. It teaches school staff how to respond to behavior safely, calmly, and respectfully, so things don't get out of hand. It also protects the emotional health of the student, and helps staff feel more confident and less afraid that they'll make the situation worse.

If schools are going to guide a student physically, like by the hand, wrist, or back, then staff need training to know when that's appropriate and how to do it safely. If they're not trained, it's not safe, and it can turn into something that feels like restraint even if that wasn't the goal.

This kind of training can help both the student and the teacher learn how to handle stress and frustration in better, safer ways. It also helps build trust. And over time, it means fewer physical restraints, fewer arguments, and a better learning environment for everyone.

I urge you to support both LD 1097 and LD 1398. Let's make sure all school staff have the tools they need to keep our classrooms safe and respectful for all students, including those who need behavioral health support.

I appreciate your time and consideration today for me to share my experience and story of how I feel about restraints.

Sincerely,

Regina Bowie

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