



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
School of Education and
Human Development

Dear Senate Chair, House Co-Chair, and Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding the proposed revisions to CH 115, Certificate 075 - School Counselor. I submit this testimony in my professional capacity as the Program Coordinator for School Counseling and a faculty member in Counselor Education at the University of Southern Maine.

I appreciate the Committee's efforts to address workforce shortages while maintaining professional standards for school counselors. The intent to streamline certification pathways and clarify preparation requirements reflects a thoughtful response to current workforce needs. At the same time, the structure and wording of these pathways will significantly shape who is deemed prepared to enter school counseling roles in Maine.

School counselors practice in roles that routinely involve crisis response, suicide risk assessment, mandated reporting, safety planning, and complex ethical decision-making with vulnerable youth and families. These responsibilities require comprehensive graduate-level preparation and supervised clinical training to ensure student safety, ethical practice, and professional accountability.

In my role, I have advised students who entered school counseling positions under conditional certification and experienced significant challenges meeting the clinical and ethical demands of the role. These students were committed and capable; however, limited coursework and the absence of supervised practicum or internship experiences left them underprepared for the complexity of school-based counseling practice. Under current rules, conditional certification may be granted after completion of approximately 40% of required graduate coursework, prior to any supervised field experience. This gap places strain on new professionals, school districts, parents/legal guardians, stakeholders, and, most importantly, students.

I support clarifying Pathway 1 to require completion of a 60-credit graduate program in School Counseling aligned with CACREP standards, with alignment verified through rigorous transcript review. This pathway should remain the primary route into the profession in Maine to ensure consistent, comprehensive preparation for the full scope of school counseling responsibilities.

I further recommend adding language to Pathway 2 clarifying that specialty school counseling coursework may supplement, but does not replace, completion of the full CACREP-aligned foundational counseling curriculum and required supervised practicum and internship experiences. Preparation consisting of a master's degree in another field with limited counseling coursework does not constitute sufficient preparation for the scope and responsibilities of school counseling practice.

Finally, I encourage the Committee to clarify the definition and review criteria for "equivalent certification," as certification standards and preparation requirements vary widely across states. Clear equivalency standards are necessary to preserve consistency, fairness, and professional rigor in Maine's certification process. Flexibility in certification pathways is important to support workforce needs. However, in a profession involving high-stakes mental health and safety decision-making with children and adolescents, flexibility must be paired with clear preparation standards and supervision expectations. These clarifications will strengthen the workforce while protecting Maine students and supporting the success of new professionals entering the field.

Respectfully submitted,
Tina Nightingale, LCPC, CSC-ME
Program Coordinator, School Counseling
Faculty, Counselor Education
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