



February 20th, 2026

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the proposed revisions to CH 115, Certificate 075. I write in my capacity as Chair of the Counselor Education Program at the University of Southern Maine and as a former School Counseling Coordinator. In both roles, I have had the privilege of preparing, mentoring, and evaluating future school counselors, as well as collaborating closely with colleagues and districts across Maine. I appreciate the Committee's commitment to addressing workforce shortages; however, any adjustments to certification requirements must be guided by the expertise of school counseling professionals and grounded in standards that protect students, families, educators, stakeholders, and communities.

I fully support the clarifications outlined in Professor Tina Nightingales' testimony, particularly: (1) maintaining Pathway 1 as completion of a 60-credit graduate program in School Counseling aligned with CACREP standards; (2) clarifying that Pathway 2 specialty coursework may supplement but does not replace the full CACREP-aligned foundational counseling curriculum and required supervised practicum and internship experiences; and (3) establishing clear, rigorous criteria for determining "equivalent certification" across states. These changes are not procedural technicalities; they directly impact the competence and readiness of professionals entrusted with crisis response, suicide risk assessment, mandated reporting, ethical decision-making, and comprehensive student support. The responsibilities of school counselors require structured graduate preparation and supervised field experiences that cannot be meaningfully condensed or substituted.

As someone who has overseen counselor preparation and supervised candidates under conditional certification, I have observed firsthand the strain placed on students and districts when individuals enter roles without essential and foundational competencies. While many of these individuals are dedicated and motivated, granting conditional certification before completion of core coursework and supervised field training creates risks for vulnerable youth and increases schools' liability. The individuals influencing and setting CH 115 requirements should be experts in school counseling preparation and those with direct experience in training, supervising, and evaluating counselor competence. These professionals understand developmental sequencing, ethical standards, and the progression from knowledge acquisition to supervised practice that ensures readiness for independent work in schools.

I strongly affirm that Maine should not permit individuals who have not yet obtained essential foundational competencies to practice under a conditional school counseling certification without substantial safeguards. That said, I recognize the reality of workforce shortages and

believe there are responsible solutions, such as structured residency models, enhanced supervision requirements, grow-your-own partnerships with districts, and targeted financial incentives, that can expand the pipeline without diluting professional standards. Protecting preparation standards and addressing workforce gaps are not mutually exclusive goals; they must be pursued together.

The proposed clarifications strengthen, not restrict, the profession. They ensure that those serving Maine's children are prepared through rigorous, comprehensive training and supervised practice. I respectfully urge the Committee to adopt these clarifications and to continue relying on school counseling professionals to guide policy decisions that shape the preparation and certification of future practitioners.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and for your commitment to Maine's students and schools.

Alexander Katopis – LCPC, ACS, NCC, CTMH, MHRT-C
Interim Department Chair
Field Placement Coordinator
Lecturer, Counselor Education Program
Doctoral Student - Capella University - Counselor Education and Supervision
USM Gorham – Bailey Hall – Office 400D
207-400-0270
alexander.katopis@maine.edu

Alex Katopis
University of Southern Maine
LD 2175

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(207) 780-5371, TTY (207) 780-5646, FAX (207) 780-5315

www.usm.maine.edu

A member of the University of Maine System

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