

# Maine Chapter

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American Academy of Pediatrics

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Sen. Carney, Rep. Moonen and members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am writing as a representative of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and organization of over 300 health care practitioners devoted to improving the health and wellbeing of Maine's children and youth.

Our members are often on the front lines of child abuse investigations and include a number of specialists in this field. We support the passage of LD 765, which would allow video recordings of forensic interviews of children to be submitted as evidence in legal proceedings.


Because our legal system emphasizes the constitutional right of an accused person to cross examine witnesses in court, any measure that restricts that right needs to include an extensive review process to ensure that the video testimony is obtained appropriately. This bill contains such safeguards of defendants' due process rights. Similar bills have passed Constitutional tests in multiple other states.

The purpose of the bill is to protect children from secondary trauma in courtrooms when giving testimony about violence they have experienced or witnessed. Typically, the child has been the victim of either physical or sexual abuse, and re-living the experience in an unfamiliar setting while confronting the defendant can generate high levels of acute anxiety. As a policy statement from our national organization states: "long term studies indicate the need for ongoing psychosocial support and counseling, not only for any victimization that may have occurred but also for children's experiences of testifying at trial." (*Pediatrics*, vol. 139 #3)

Providing testimony to a trained individual in a neutral, child-friendly environment minimizes the emotional strain on the victim related to retelling traumatic details.

We believe this bill is long overdue, providing an effective and humane vehicle for gathering information fairly in these tragic cases, when children have already been subjected to toxic stress.

Sincerely,

  
Sydney R. Sewall, MD MPH  
Hallowell