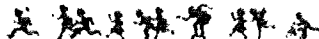




MASP

Maine Association of School Psychologists 

To: Joint Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

From: Maine Association of School Psychologists

Re: Neither For Nor Against LD 829: An Act to Improve Behavioral Health Support for Students in Public Schools

Date: March 28, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, greetings. My name is Ruth Crowell, I am a certified school psychologist-specialist with 40 years of experiences providing school psychological services in the state of Maine and am the past-president of the Maine Association of School Psychologists. I am speaking neither for nor against LD 829, An Act to Improve Behavioral Health Support for Students in Public Schools.

MASP supports the goal of improving behavioral health support in Maine's schools. Children and adolescents are currently facing a mental health crisis. According to the National Association of School Psychologists, one in five students are suffering from a mental health disorder and roughly 80% of children and youth who are in need of mental health services do not receive them. Furthermore, the majority of students who do receive mental health services will receive them within the school setting. Data indicates that when student's mental health needs are met, this leads to an improved ability to learn as well as ongoing safety and crisis prevention. This information clearly identifies the strong need for increasing student access to school based behavioral and mental health services. (<https://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/state-shortages-data-dashboard>)

MASP supports increasing the ratio of school based mental health providers as a means of increasing student access to mental health services. LD 829 addresses improving ratios for Guidance Counselors and school-based Social Workers as well as increasing the number of school-based Board Certified Behavioral Analysts. However, LD 829 does not address the ratio of students to school psychologists, even though Maine's ratio of approximately 1,500 - 1 is well above the recommended ratio of 500 - 1 and also well above the standards proposed for other school-based mental health service providers in LD 829.

School psychologists' unique training in the fields of psychology and education specifically prepare us to effectively provide a broad range of mental and behavioral health services in public schools. These services include identifying students with mental health needs and providing services for these students on multiple levels within the school setting. School Psychologists'



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training includes direct services such as individual and group therapy as in developing effective behavioral interventions for students. School Psychologists also have expertise in leading schools to develop Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) specifically focused on improving students' Social Emotional Learning (SEL). The breadth and depth of School Psychologist's training in providing a broad range of school-based behavioral and mental health supports and interventions makes them valuable members of a school's behavioral and mental health team.

Given the important role school psychologists play in identifying and addressing student behavioral and mental health needs, MASP believes that it is critical to include a goal for decreasing the ratio of students to school psychologists within Maine schools as part of LD 829. We believe omitting school psychologists from this bill represents a grave oversight.

Ruth Crowell, M.A.

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