



Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine
The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers

Malory Otteson Shaughnessy, Executive Director

Testimony in Support of LD 829

**An Act to Improve Behavioral Support for Students in Maine's
Public Schools**

Sponsored by Representative Lydia Crafts

March 28, 2023

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Good afternoon Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. I am Malory Shaughnessy, a resident of Westbrook, and the Executive Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services. The Alliance is the statewide association representing the majority of Maine's safety net community based mental health and substance use treatment providers. The Alliance advocates for the implementation of sound policies and evidence-based practices that serve to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our behavioral health care system.

On behalf of the Alliance, I am here today to speak in support of LD 829, as well as to offer a few comments and possible amended additions.

This bill does the following three things that I would like to speak to:

First, it requires that school social workers spend at least 80% of their time providing direct services to students. Our youth are suffering a mental health crisis and we need to be doing all that we can to help mitigate the crisis. Ensuring that school social workers have the time dedicated to focus on these issues it of utmost importance and the Alliance whole-heartedly supports this goal.

The provisions set forth in this bill which amend Sec. 4. 20-A MRSA §15672 and Sec. 5.-7. 20-A MRSA §15679 would seem to do a great deal to increase school counseling and school social work personnel in districts and the total amount of school counselors and school social workers available time to work with students in need (which as stated above is vast and only increasing).

Secondly, the proposal also requires school administrative units to employ an educator at each school in the school administrative unit who has completed a national board-certified assistant behavior analyst training and provides that the State must pay all costs associated with the training and provide an annual stipend of \$3,000 for up to 3 years for each educator who completes the training.

Assistant Behavior Analysts are generally responsible for developing and monitoring individual behavior management protocols and behavior intervention plans, providing support, instruction, and feedback to families and caregivers with regard to managing challenging behaviors and teaching replacement behaviors and to review program effectiveness, make recommendations, monitor data collection, and chart progress. These are skills that are badly needed to support the work required in our schools.

Finally, the bill provides that for the purpose of the calculation of salary and benefit costs in the school funding formula, the elementary school and middle school level student-to-guidance staff ratio is decreased to 250:1. It also adds a student-to-school social worker ratio of 250:1 for the elementary school, middle school and high school levels. These ratios are important as our students arrive at school with behavioral health issues that must be addressed in order to allow the student to meet educational goals.

I would also offer one amendment to consider in your work session discussions. Many schools, especially in rural areas, may struggle to recruit and retain social workers and counselors. Building in an option that these services could be performed through contract or MOU with community based behavioral health agencies could help address the hours needed in our schools for these services. It also has an added benefit that the child and family could become aware of other behavioral health services in the community that they might avail themselves of as needed.

It is for all of these reasons I am urging committee members to vote ought to pass on LD 829. I'd be pleased to answer any questions you have for me.