

In- Support LD 2002

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and honorable members of the Education & Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Hannah Schlotterbeck, and I am a Sweetser school-based clinician in two schools in Brunswick and Harpswell serving children in pre-k through the 5th grade. I'm speaking today in strong support of LD 2002 An Act to Provide Incentives to Schools that Contract for Certain Social Work and Family Therapy Services.

I believe in this work, as I deeply believe in the potential in each individual child and their family system. The overwhelming majority of my kiddos qualify for MaineCare, have a caregiver or caregivers who work long, hard hours to support their family, and who benefit greatly from having access to mental health services during school hours and in collaboration with their schools. It is a true team approach. In addition to my individual and family therapy sessions, many of which are informed by individual and generational trauma, I work closely with school social workers, school counselors, school behavior specialists, teachers and principals to figure out how to best support each child, their family, and what they need from myself, their family and from their school environment.

I began working with a dear child in the second grade in the fall of 2022. He was artistic, athletic, angry, bright, confused, and expressed a low self-image with frequent negative thoughts about himself. He received "behavior slips" regularly at school, resulting in generally staying inside from recess and sitting in a separate room for lunch due to some targeting of his peers and inappropriate comments and behaviors. And most concerning to everyone was that he was sad and expressed not liking himself. We checked-in each week using a bucket metaphor, and he'd tell me how full his bucket was. Each week, for that first year, he'd bend down and put his hand at his ankles and say "I'd down here" or "I'm empty". Using expressive arts therapy weekly over the school year, we explored who he was and what was going on for him. Before school let out for the summer, he came to the realization that he felt misunderstood, pegged as a "bad kid" and incapable of "making good choices". He shared that when he lashed out at others what he really was trying to say was "I don't feel loved" or "I don't feel cared about or seen". He shared that he rejected others before they could reject him. I worked collaboratively with the school social worker, as well as the principal and behavior specialist at the school, sharing bits and pieces of what he told me would be OK to share about what he needed and we worked to figure out a better path forward.

Over the summer, he and his family attended regularly family therapy with me and worked so hard to support and love their child the way he was able to communicate he needed to be loved and supported. And when school started, I continued to mediate conversations between his parents and his school, working to repair and build those relationships up, as the school cared deeply about this child. Now having just started his second semester of third grade, he has gone at least two months without a behavior slip. He has a wonderful teacher who he feels understood by, speaks happily about the staff at his school, he is outdoors for recess, playing with his peers, and has shown great progress in using coping skills and healthy communication when a conflict does happen. He is back to eating in the cafeteria, has changes to his IEP to reflect his mental health needs at the school. And most important of all, he is so much happier. For the past two months, or so, when we check-in about his bucket he puts his hand on his head with a big smile and says "I'm up here".

Thank you for your time and hopefully your support of this bill.

Sincerely,
Hannah Schlotterbeck
School-Based Clinician