



**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 2002, An Act to Provide Incentives to Schools That Contract  
for Certain Social Work and Family Therapy Services**

**Sponsored by Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross  
January 11, 2024**

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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 2002, "An Act to Provide Incentives to Schools That Contract for Certain Social Work and Family Therapy Services." This bill really is a simple proposal, it authorizes school administrative units to contract for social work and family therapy services for students within schools. Further, this bill directs the Department of Education to administer a grant program that will provide resources for those contracts.

Allocating funds for a grant program that facilitates contracting with behavioral health providers, the Department of Education can significantly enhance the support systems available to our students. We all agree that there is a severe shortage of access to mental health services for young people and their families. Having behavioral health providers within schools will go a long way to addressing that shortage.

Many schools, as you all know well, face budget constraints that limit their ability to provide these services even when they are aware the needs exist. This grant program would alleviate this financial burden and allow schools to proactively address the mental health needs of their students.

Additionally, as we continue to face high rates of substance use disorder and alcohol use disorder in our state, the point must be made that **mental health support is a prevention strategy** for problematic alcohol and drug use. In fact, mental health support for young people and their families is a prevention strategy for many of the issues prevalent in our state.

Finally, I want to bring attention to the term "contract with" behavioral health professionals. This is purposeful. We are not asking schools to hire more counselors to add to their own staff. It is important that these services are provided by professionals located outside the school staff and embedded within the state's continuum of care. Behavioral health professionals that contract with schools are naturally going to have better access to referral information and warm handoffs for care when schools adjourn for breaks and for when young people graduate.

For all these reasons, the Alliance asks you to support LD 2002. Thank you.