

An Act to Correct Inconsistencies, Conflicts and Errors in the Laws of Maine
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
Public Hearing Date: April 10, 2024
Testimony in Support of LD 2290

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Michael Dudley and I reside in Auburn, Maine. I currently serve as the Math Instructional Coach and the Math Content Leader at Lewiston High School and have almost twenty years of experience as a secondary educator who has worked with children through a trauma-informed lens my entire career. I submit this letter in full support of LD 2290.

The current law (LD 765) allows forensic interviews to be used as evidence, to mitigate some of the harm of having children fully redisclose their abuse in a courtroom. It is a positive step in reducing retraumatization that happens when children have to redisclose trauma repeatedly, and especially in a courtroom setting with many strangers, and their abuser.

There are children currently in need of that same protection and care. Because the law didn't explicitly state that it applies to pending cases, judges aren't able to admit the interviews. Please extend this care to pending cases, and help children who are in this situation right now.

Educators like me are on the front lines of reporting abuse. According to Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Services, more than half of cases of sexual abuse are recognized and reported by educators working in schools, and that research indicates an overwhelming rate at which reports are true. Yet, the vast majority of children do not report their abuse.

Our local policies require us to act with speed and urgency when children show signs that they are victims of abuse for these reasons. Therefore, the ability to obtain, use, and present recent evidence in these cases, with a minimum of further harm done to victims, is critical, and in line with the urgency expected of us as professionals and mandated reporters.

There is a child I know that is impacted by this, and it would mean a tremendous difference in their court experience to have this amendment passed. Further, what we do now to ensure that children are supported fully in forensic environments can ensure that more reporting takes place and that justice is realized for more children across our state. Please extend the current decision to include forensic interviews to the children who need it most, going through these processes right now.

For these reasons, on behalf of all affected children seeking justice for their abuse, I am in support of LD 2290 as emergency legislation. Thank you for taking the time to read and consider this testimony.

Sincerely yours,

Michael C. Dudley
Math Instructional Coach
Lewiston High School