



Maine Education Association

Jesse Hargrove *President*
Beth French *Vice President*
Jaye Rich *Treasurer*
Rebecca Cole *NEA Director*
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Testimony

In Support Of

LD 98: An Act to Include School Counselors in the Educators for Maine Program

John Kosinski, Government Relations Director, Maine Education Association

Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

February 26, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and other esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Jan Kosinski, and I am the Director of Government Relations for the Maine Education Association (MEA). The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators, including teachers and other educators in nearly every public school in the state, as well as full-time faculty and other professional and support staff in both the University of Maine and Community College systems. Thousands of retired educators continue their connection and advocacy work through the MEA- Retired program. I offer this testimony today on behalf of the MEA in SUPPORT of LD 98, *An Act to Include School Counselors in the Educators for Maine Program*.

Over this session, I expect you will hear quite a bit about the need for more counselors in our public schools. Teachers and educators all over the state have reported to us that there are real concerns about the mental health of students, and we are constantly hearing that schools have a dire need to have more counselors in schools to help students address the multitude of mental health concerns they are grappling with.

At the same, time, I expect you will also continue to hear about the workforce shortages plaguing our public schools. Teachers, counselors, and many other roles are in high demand with no supply. A cursory search of [servingschools.com](https://www.servingschools.com) shows there are currently, as of February 25, 2025, open school counselor positions in MSAD 6 (Hollis), Falmouth, RSU 3 (Unity), Fryeburg Academy, MSAD 31 (Howland), Gorham, Augusta, Islesboro, MSAD 31 (Harrington), Richmond, RSU 72 (Fryeburg), Calais among many others. North to south, from the coast to the mountains, our schools need counselors, especially during this time of serious mental health concerns from students and the behavioral challenges educators are reporting to us and likely to you as well.

This is why we support LD 98. This bill is a technical fix that would allow school counselors to qualify for both the initial loan and the loan forgiveness programs administered by the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME). These loans and forgiveness programs can be up to \$5,000 per year. We support any effort to help more undergraduate and graduate students in Maine enter the professions that are



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critical for our schools and our students.

However, I must point out, the current program is not sufficient and should be expanded. I know this Committee has spent time debating the Maine State Grant program and the qualifications for receiving this important support from the state. But our schools are facing tremendous workforce shortages. Currently the Educators for Maine program is providing loan support and forgiveness for 20-30 students per year. Given the shortages we are seeing this is not enough. We hope the Committee, in addition to the change in this bill, will also advocate for a broad expansion of the Educators for Maine program to help more students in our higher education systems consider a career as a teacher, counselor or one of the many other professional shortage areas in our schools. Thank you for your time and your service to the people of Maine. I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.