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Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Abigail Werthmann and I am a senior at Falmouth High School. I am here testifying in support of LD 211.

This bill is incredibly important to me because I have drug-resistant generalized epilepsy. My voice may fluctuate during this testimony – it is a side effect of one of my treatments – so bear with me. My condition impacts my school experience and makes me keenly aware of the need for a safe, supportive school environment for students like me.

Eight years ago, I had an 8-minute tonic-clonic (grand mal) seizure, leading to my diagnosis. Since then, I have tried over half of all available anti-epileptic drugs, each having debilitating side effects and all failing to fully control my seizures. I endure 40 to 50 absence seizures, sometimes more, every day, and several tonic-clonic seizures a year, although those seem to be increasing in frequency. Despite two surgeries – a VNS implant in 2022 and an RNS implant in 2023 – my seizures persist.

Seizures interrupt my classes and I have had trouble processing information and keeping up academically. I've worked extra hard and am super lucky to have had a strong support network, and as a result, am heading to Columbia University next year. But more than the academic challenges I face at school, my greatest concern is safety. Epilepsy is unpredictable. I never know when or where a seizure will happen – I may be in class, walking through the halls, alone in the bathroom, or on the field hockey field. I have had seizures during school and at practice that have left everyone involved scared. Thankfully, I had people around me who knew what

to do, but that will not always be the case and at other schools is not the case. For people like me, the fear of having a seizure in an unprepared environment is constant: *Will someone know what to do? Will I be safe?* And beyond my own safety, I also worry about the people around me: *Will they panic? Am I going to traumatize them?*

No student should have to carry this burden.

In Maine, more than 14,000 people live with epilepsy, and many are students who, like me, have had to self-advocate at school where teachers and staff members may not know what epilepsy is or have seen a seizure or are trained in seizure first aid. And too often, the burden falls on students and their families to educate and hope that, in an emergency, someone will know what to do.

That is not good enough.

Recognizing this gap, I asked my State Representative Amy Kuhn to sponsor this bill and I am grateful for her empathetic and unwavering support to ensure that schools are better equipped to recognize and respond to seizures. I have spent years advocating for seizure first aid training in my school, only to find that voluntary efforts were not enough. This bill changes that.

Families should not have to send their children to school wondering if their teachers, coaches, or administrators know how to help them in a medical emergency. Passing this bill would not only protect students with epilepsy but also provide peace of mind to families like mine. Knowing that trained individuals are present in schools could sometimes mean the difference between life and death.

I strongly urge this committee to support LD 211 because every student deserves a safe learning environment. Thank you.