

Testimony in Support of LD 211

Good morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Kate Phillips, I am 23 years old and I live in Portland. I am testifying in support of LD 211.

As an individual with epilepsy, who had a seizure in school, this legislation is deeply personal to me. I was diagnosed with epilepsy when I was six years old, and had a seizure in my first-grade classroom in Needham, Massachusetts, where I grew up. My memories of that day are fuzzy. I remember sitting in my chair during independent reading time, and my teacher, Mrs. Schenker, asking if I was okay. The next thing I knew, I was lying on the floor, dazed and confused. I remember being carried on a stretcher to an ambulance, with my mom and an EMT on either side of me. I specifically recall the EMT asking me about my Halloween costume. It was late October, so of course, I was prepared for the upcoming holiday. And I wanted to tell him about my costume, but I couldn't remember it. I had no idea what was going on or why my memory seemed to be malfunctioning, and I will never forget the overwhelming confusion and fear I felt in that moment.

But having read LD 211, and with weeks of reflection, I realize that despite the awful experience, I could not have been more lucky. I had already been diagnosed with epilepsy, so my teacher and nurses had a seizure action plan ready. Mrs. Schenker noticed my leg stiffen strangely, and she came over to check on me. When I did not respond, she noted the time and asked the teacher next door to take my classmates outside of the classroom. She then laid me on my side in case I vomited, and called the school nurse, who was prepared to administer rescue medication should the seizure continue past five minutes. EMTs arrived promptly, and I was taken to a nearby hospital. I am so grateful for the people and resources that kept me safe.

I tell you this story to contrast my access to immediate emergency care with that of many people in Maine. According to a 2023 study by the Maine Rural Health Research Center, 15 out of 16 counties in Maine have ambulance deserts, which are populated census blocks with their geographic center outside of a 25-minute ambulance service area.¹ This issue is also exemplified in the many news stories about Mainers in emergencies waiting hours to get help.²

A seizure that extends past five minutes can indicate status epilepticus.³ This condition requires an immediate response, including administering a rescue medication, if one is available. Without this medical care, status epilepticus can be life-threatening.⁴ With so many areas of Maine lacking emergency services that can arrive in five minutes, staff may be the only people available to administer rescue medication and help a child recover from a seizure in school.

¹ Jonk, Y., Milkowski, C., Croll, Z., & Pearson, K. (2023). *Ambulance Deserts: Geographic Disparities in the Provision of Ambulance Services* [Chartbook]. University of Southern Maine, Muskie School, Maine Rural Health Research Center

² WABI News Desk. (2025, January 9). *EMS crisis in Maine exposes worst case scenario for rural residents*. <https://www.wabi.tv/>; WABI. <https://www.wabi.tv/2025/01/09/ems-crisis-maine-exposes-worst-case-scenario-rural-residents/>

³ Singh, R. (2023, May 12). *Status Epilepticus*. Epilepsy Foundation. <https://www.epilepsy.com/complications-risks/emergencies/status-epilepticus>

⁴ *Seizure Rescue Therapies*. (n.d.). Epilepsy Foundation. <https://www.epilepsy.com/treatment/seizure-rescue-therapies>

Additionally, anyone - even those not diagnosed with epilepsy - can have a seizure at any time for a variety of reasons. As a result, it is critical that teachers know how to respond to a seizure, whether or not the school has children with epilepsy. For example, it is crucial that children having a seizure are immediately placed on their side. Seizures can involve vomiting, which would choke a child laying on their back.

This legislation is critical for protecting students who have seizures for any reason, be it epilepsy, a different seizure disorder, or a temporary condition such as a high fever. Providing staff and students with seizure response training, and developing action plans, will allow schools to be a safe place for children who have seizures. It is my wish that every child who has a seizure at school in Maine can grow up to realize how lucky they are to live in a state that values their safety. I urge you to vote ought-to-pass on LD 211. Thank you for your time, and for your service to the State of Maine.

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