



Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine
The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers

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Testimony in Support of

***An Act to Provide Grants to Schools That Contract for Behavioral and
Mental Health Services & An Act to Ensure Behavioral and Mental Health
Services Are Available to Students by Providing Grants to Schools That
Contract for Those Services – LD 1203 & LD 858***

April 8, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and honorable members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Adam Bloom-Paicopolos. I am a resident of Wells and am proud to serve as the Executive Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine (the Alliance). The Alliance is the statewide association representing Maine's community-based behavioral health agencies who provide much-needed mental health and substance use services to over 80,000 children, adults, and families annually. 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 strong support of two bills this afternoon that would stabilize our school-based services system: LD 1203, "An Act to Provide Grants to Schools That Contract for Behavioral and Mental Health Service", and LD 858, "An Act to Ensure Behavioral and Mental Health Services Are Available to Students by Providing Grants to Schools That Contract for Those Services".

The mental and emotional well-being of Maine students is a foundational element of their academic success and long-term health. School-based services directly supports these goals by addressing the persistent and growing gap between the mental health needs of students and the capacity of schools to meet those needs. By offering targeted grants to help cover the cost of community behavioral health clinicians, this bill represents an important step towards stabilizing and rebuilding integrated, preventative care that reaches children where they are.

The need for community-based behavioral health services for Maine's children was underscored last November when the state entered into a settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice regarding improvements to the state's children's behavioral health system.¹ The agreement highlights the importance of strengthening the full continuum of care and expanding access to community-based services for children and youth with behavioral health needs. As a preventative, upstream model of care, school-based services are exactly the type of program that Maine must invest in to ensure that children and families have meaningful access to behavioral health care before needs go unaddressed and escalate to a higher, more complex level of care and treatment.

Several community behavioral health providers are already actively engaged in delivering these services in partnership with school districts across the state, though flaws in the current funding model under MaineCare have resulted in a sharp decline of availability in recent years. With an already strained behavioral health workforce, agencies have struggled to recruit and retain clinicians to fill these positions.

One such agency can only fill half of the placements it has established with schools – leaving many districts contracted to receive an embedded clinician unable to get the help they need. This past school year, another agency had to make the impossible decision to curtail its footprint of schools it operated in due to workforce issues and significant financial losses in the program.ⁱⁱ

I've seen the impact that losing this critical service can have in my own community. My wife is an elementary school counselor in North Berwick that was lucky enough to partner with a behavioral health agency to deliver the school-based model. Students greatly benefited from the program as it allowed them to stay at school in a safe and comfortable environment and see a clinician with a deeper understanding of their needs thanks to direct access to parents, teachers, school counselors, and school administration.

However, her district was one of many this year that lost their school-based clinician due to staffing challenges. The majority of her students that were seeing their school-based clinician last year now no longer receive any behavioral health care. Due to lengthy waitlists, challenging parent work schedules, long travel times, and missing school hours, accessing care is next to impossible for these families. As a result, the behavioral issues and academic performance of these children has suffered.

Investing in school-based services will help ensure that students have timely access to behavioral health support, ultimately reducing disciplinary issues, improving academic outcomes, and promoting overall well-being. We know this model works, and we know that there is strong and growing demand from schools for this program. It represents an investment in the future of Maine's children and in the behavioral health system that supports them.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support the funding for school-based services proposed in LD 1203 and LD 858. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony this afternoon and for your continued commitment to Maine's children and families. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully,



Adam Bloom-Paicopolos, MPP
Executive Director

ⁱ U.S. Department of Justice. *Justice Department Secures Agreement with Maine to Ensure Children with Behavioral Health Disabilities Can Live at Home*. November 2024. <https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/justice-department-secures-agreement-maine-ensure-children-behavioral-health-disabilities>

ⁱⁱ Portland Press Herland. *Sweetser can't sustain its mental health services to 18 Maine school districts*. June 2024. <https://www.pressherald.com/2024/06/03/youth-mental-health-provider-to-reduce-in-school-services-in-maine/>