

# **Testimony in Support of LD1203 An Act to Provide Grants to Schools That Contract for Behavioral and Mental Health Services (and LD858)**

**April 8, 2025**

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Eric Meyer. I am a resident of Whitefield, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and the President & CEO of Spurwink Services. At Spurwink, we provide behavioral health and educational services to over 10,000 Maine children, adults, and families across our state with over 1,000 Maine employees.

I am here today to speak in support of LD1203 and the related LD858, to provide grants to schools that contract for behavioral health and mental health services. Maine is facing a critical shortage of mental health services for children. As of January, 422 Maine children are on waitlists to receive behavioral health treatment. The 2023 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS) results reveal concerning mental health trends among Maine's children with increased levels of depression and anxiety. And even as we watch the behavioral health issues our children are facing that are on the rise, the number of school-based clinicians decreased by over 95 clinicians from last school year to this school year due to funding. LD 1203 is a school-based prevention program which we all agree we need more of. Behavioral health support in schools functions as a key prevention program by addressing student needs before they escalate into more serious issues.

As an example: one of our therapists is working with a second-grade student being raised by her father. She has had no contact with her mother since infancy due to her mother's substance use and safety concerns. While this child is very bright academically, she has exhibited highly disruptive classroom behaviors. She would become upset and lash out at her peers and teachers. The school-based therapist developed a caring and supportive relationship with this child, worked with her to learn and practice healthy self-regulation and coping skills, and to process the sadness and anger she felt about her mother. The therapist partnered with the classroom teacher and school staff in the development of a behavior intervention plan to help the student be more successful at school. The therapist also worked with the child's father, helping him better understand child development and learn positive parenting strategies. The therapist then helped bridge the previously tense relationship between the father and the school. Today this student's school behavior is dramatically improved. Teachers and administrators feel much more equipped to support her. The young girl and her father report a stronger relationship.

LD 1203 represents a sustainable commitment to our children's mental health. This investment will pay dividends through: Improved graduation rates; Reduced need for more intensive services later; Stronger, healthier communities; Long-term reduction in healthcare and social service costs. Support LD 1203 to ensure every Maine student has access to the mental health support they need to succeed.

Thanks so much for the opportunity to provide testimony this afternoon and for your leadership and commitment to the educational attainment, health and wellbeing of your constituents and our communities.

Respectfully submitted,

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