

A Statement in Support of:
**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**
And
**LD 1203: An Act to Provide Grants to Schools That Contract for Behavioral and Mental Health Services
Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs**

NAMI Maine strongly endorses LD 858 and 1203 and any initiatives supporting increasing mental health services available to Maine Youth. The number of young people in our state meeting criteria for mental health challenges has steadily grown, with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to linger. Additionally, as a state, many barriers have been identified that result in struggles with engaging in treatment within the community setting. School-based mental health services have been found to help address these challenges and concerns.

According to the most recent data collected from the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS) in 2023, 35% of high school students in Maine and 33.7% of middle school students reported feeling so sad or hopeless in the previous 12 months that they stopped engaging in their regular activities. Additionally, 38.2% of high schoolers and 35.7% of middle schoolers did not seek support despite their feelings of depression and anxiety.¹ Maine is currently viewed as the third highest state for youth mental health needs.² School-based mental health services are recognized to reduce the impacts of mental health challenges in our youth. With school mental health services in place, young people struggling were identified earlier and received coordination of care. As a result, there was a decrease in absenteeism and behavioral concerns and an overall increase in performance.³ Additionally, it has been noted that providing services within the school setting significantly reduces barriers that we hear from families across the state. This includes the ability for guardians to leave their work, travel to pick up their children, transport them to the appointment, and then return. Many evidence-based treatments require multiple sessions in succession, which may need to be completed up to once a week. As a state, we have recognized that transportation, as a whole, is a barrier for many who seek resources. Additionally, many areas lack access to nearby mental health providers. This can result in some parents needing to allot at least 2-3 hours a week to provide their children with the support necessary to treat their conditions, many of whom cannot miss that many hours of work. Additionally, the same amount of time would be required of young people to miss school throughout the day, as afternoon and evening appointments are often difficult to obtain. By providing young people with treatment and support within their school's support system, many of these barriers can be overcome.

NAMI Maine acknowledges that the state is facing a challenging fiscal situation. However, by supporting schools in providing mental health resources within their settings, we are investing in the future of our state. These services have been found to assist with many of the challenges that this committee has grappled with this session, including behavioral concerns and academic performance. These services also assist with early intervention, treatment, and long-term stability as our young people develop. Because of this, NAMI Maine supports the passage of LD 858 and 1203.

ABOUT NAMI MAINE: Incorporated in 1984, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine Chapter (NAMI Maine) is the state's largest grassroots mental health organization. With support from national and regional affiliates, the agency is dedicated to building better lives for everyone impacted by behavioral health concerns. NAMI Maine engages with leaders and community partners at all levels to improve the state's mental health system through collaboration and education.

¹ Home | miyhs

² Best (and Worst) States for Youth Mental Health Access and Costs

³ School-based Mental Health Interventions Targeting Depression or Anxiety: A Meta-analysis of Rigorous Randomized Controlled Trials for School-aged Children and Adolescents - PMC

LEGISLATIVE CONTACT

Hannah Longley, LCSW, Director of Community
Programs
(207) 622-5767 ○ HannahL@namimaine.org

POSITIONS & POLICY AGENDA
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