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**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  
Testimony in Support**

**April 8, 2025**

**Northern Light Health**  
Acadia Hospital  
A.R. Gould Hospital  
Blue Hill Hospital  
C.A. Dean Hospital  
Eastern Maine Medical Center  
Home Care & Hospice  
Inland Hospital  
Maine Coast Hospital  
Mayo Hospital  
Mercy Hospital  
Northern Light Health Foundation  
Northern Light Pharmacy  
Sebasticook Valley Hospital

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Lisa Harvey-McPherson RN. I am submitting testimony on behalf of Northern Light Health and our member organizations in support of this bill. Northern Light Health member organizations include 10 hospitals located in southern, central, eastern and northern Maine, 8 nursing facilities, air and ground ambulance, behavioral health, addiction treatment, pharmacy, primary and specialty care practices and a state-wide home care and hospice program. Ninety three percent of Maine's population lives in the Northern Light Health service area. Northern Light Health is also proud to be one of Maine's largest employers with more than 10,000 employees statewide.

Northern Light Acadia Hospital is a 100-bed licensed hospital providing comprehensive inpatient and outpatient services caring for the people of Maine. Patients throughout the State are served by Acadia behavioral health clinicians, many residing in northern and eastern Maine. We offer a variety of services for children and teens. Some of the services we offer include mental health evaluation, medication management, individual and family therapy, specialized outpatient group therapy, occupational therapy, care coordination, day treatment services, inpatient treatment and school-based services. On any given day, the children's demand for behavioral health services exceeds the capacity statewide. At Acadia we are actively reaching out to children in need in communities and primary care practices to expand access to care, school-based health care is an important component of access.

Today, we are serving children in many school districts, I have attached a map to my testimony that shows schools we support with onsite services and telepsychiatry care. Our services can be paid for via a contract with the school or we can bill the child's insurance provider.

The bill states that funds provided under the grant program under may be used only for behavioral and mental health services that are not otherwise covered or reimbursable through the MaineCare program. We recommend that the bill be amended to state that funds may only be used when there is no insurance coverage for the behavioral and mental health services provided to the child. State funding should not be used when MaineCare or private insurance coverage are available to cover the services.

In a June 2023 focus group on a grant funded school-based program we are delivering, a middle school principal shared that the Acadia services offered to the school have significantly decreased the amount of outreach that they need to do to their local crisis provider when students have been struggling emotionally at school. They highlighted the value of that for the students who did not have to leave the school for an evaluation and for the school team who were able to remain focused on academic needs while Acadia managed the psychiatric needs.

In November of 2023 we surveyed our school partners about the children's behavioral health services we provide and received strong positive feedback. Schools responded that:

- Mental health support to students has really helped them to thrive at school and allowed school staff to focus their time and efforts on helping students academically, as they have support for their mental health needs.
- Acadia services have a direct impact on our students' mental health. Students are able to process struggles and receive help without having to leave the building. Being embedded within the school day allows students services who might not otherwise be able to access this much needed help.
- Many of our students need to talk about their feelings and experiences to cope with academics and social life.

This bill establishes a grant program within the Department of Education to provide grants to school administrative units that contract for behavioral and mental health services provided by licensed behavioral and mental health service providers. The bill limits the use of funds provided through the grant program to behavioral and mental health services that are not otherwise covered or reimbursable through the MaineCare program and provides that funds must be used in a manner that does not supplant qualified and available school administrative unit behavioral and mental health staff. The bill also provides that the amounts of the grants must be based on a school administrative unit's population and provides ongoing funding for the grants starting in fiscal year 2025-26.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this important legislation.



**Northern Light**<sup>SM</sup>

Acadia Hospital

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# School-Based Services

September 2024



## MSAD 30

Lee/Winn Elementary, Mt. Jefferson Junior High



## RSU 34

Old Town Elementary, Leonard Middle School, Old Town High School



## RSU 26

Asa Adams Elementary, Orono Middle School, Orono High School



## SAD 44

Crescent Park Elementary, Woodstock Elementary, Telstar Middle School, Telstar High School



## RSU 22

Hampden Academy, Leroy Smith Elementary, Wagner Middle School



## Veazie Community School



## Ellsworth School Department

Ellsworth High School, Hancock County Technical Center



## RSU 25

GH Jewett School, Miles Lane School, Bucksport Middle School, Bucksport High School

## MSAD 53

Vickery Elementary, Warsaw Middle School

## RSU 3

Monroe Elementary, Morse Elementary, Mt. View Elementary, Mt. View Middle School, Mt. View High School, Troy Elementary, Walker Elementary

## AOS 93

Nobleboro Central School



## School Union 76

Deer Isle-Stonington Elementary, Deer Isle-Stonington High School, Brooklin School, Sedgewick Elementary



## AOS 91

Connors Emerson Elementary, Cranberry Island School, Frenchboro School, MDI High School, MDI Elementary, Pemetic Elementary, Swan's Island School, Trenton Elementary, Trenton Consolidated School

## Key



On site



Tele-Psychiatry

