

April 8, 2025

Good afternoon Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Blythe Edwards, and I am a resident of Gardiner.

I am here today to speak to you regarding 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.

Thank you for your time and consideration listening to my testimony today. I have worked in mental health for over 20 years, and been at Spurwink for the last 12 years. I began my work there as a public school-based clinician. Currently I oversee regional outpatient services at our Spurwink Randolph location, including our public school-based clinician team.

School-based counseling is a program that is near and dear to my heart. I thoroughly believe that this model of counseling is one of the most effective ways to provide counseling to children, specifically those with families who have limited income and resources. The reality is that it is incredibly difficult to find outpatient clinicians who accept Mainecare. If a family is lucky enough to find a clinician who accepts Mainecare, there often is a long wait for services. Many of the families we work with cannot afford to take time off to get their child to therapy, or they do not have reliable transportation. Schools are able to recognize that a child would benefit from behavioral support, but do not have the means or staffing to offer this. School-based counseling allows the child to receive individual counseling, as well as supporting them in classroom. The clinician coordinates with the school to help administrators and teachers understand behaviors, and support interventions that will help students both socially-emotionally and academically.

There are so many examples I can think of in which children and families benefitted from this service- but I only have 3 minutes, so I will just offer one. After the Lewiston shooting, one of our schools learned that a student had lost a parent in the shooting. The school quickly recognized how deeply this youth would be impacted, and the child was referred to school-based counseling. The clinician coordinated with the school and family. The clinician set up a home visit with the child so that, when the child returned to school the following week, they already knew the clinician, and could meet with them the day they returned. This clinician worked with this child for several months on a weekly basis. Their office became a safe space for this child to explore their feelings, to learn about and understand grief, to sort out the complicated emotions surrounding such a devastating loss, and to remember and celebrate the life of their loved one. Without school-based counseling, this child would not have received services; their parent had neither the time nor the income to allow them to seek traditional outpatient counseling. The clinician was able to work with the school and help teachers and administrators to better understand and support this youth in the process. Despite such a terrible loss, this child was able to attend school and thrive academically and socially.

There is so much more I could say about school-based counseling, and I have so many other stories- this is just one of many of the beneficial ways our program has impacted Maine communities. Please help us to continue this incredible service.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



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