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AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1400

TTY: Maine Relay 711

Yusuf M. Yusuf

184 Pearl Street, Apt. 303
Portland, ME 04101
Phone: (207) 415-3438

Yusuf.Yusuf@legislature.maine.gov

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Testimony of Yusuf Yusuf introducing

LD 1123, An Act to Provide Funding for MaineCare-related Services for Public Schools

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Yusuf Yusuf, and I represent House District 118, which includes part of Portland. I am pleased to present **LD 1123, An Act to Provide Funding for MaineCare-related Services for Public Schools**.

Having served on a school board, I have witnessed numerous efforts to establish roles within the district, specifically to manage the complexities of the MaineCare reimbursement process. School districts often face significant challenges in navigating this system. I believe that initiatives aimed at addressing this issue would not only support the districts themselves but also provide vital assistance to children and families. With so many students experiencing mental health challenges, access to Medicaid funding is essential to ensuring they receive the support necessary for academic success.

This bill seeks to fund two full-time MaineCare Coordinator positions within the Department of Education, both of whom would work directly with local school districts. The two proposed positions are intended to deliver specialized technical support and serve as key facilitators in streamlining the MaineCare reimbursement process for local school districts. These roles will be instrumental in ensuring that districts can effectively navigate the administrative and regulatory complexities associated with Medicaid billing. By enhancing compliance, improving claims accuracy, and expediting reimbursement timelines, these positions will not only alleviate the operational burden on school personnel but also maximize the availability of funding for critical student support services.

Research conducted by the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) at the University of Maine System found that Maine school districts vary widely in their MaineCare billing practices, with many failing to claim all the federal funds they are eligible to receive. In fact, only 45% of districts participated in reimbursement for eligible services delivered in public school settings. This represents a missed opportunity, as increased participation could provide a significant source of additional revenue to help offset the growing costs of special education in Maine schools.

Unlike larger districts, many smaller districts have historically faced challenges in accessing these federal funds. These coordinators would support schools throughout the Medicaid application process by clarifying eligible expenses, assisting with necessary documentation, ensuring compliance with federal requirements and helping schools obtain appropriate reimbursement for qualified services.

According to the report, MaineCare is a highly complex system, posing a significant barrier for school districts that lack the necessary knowledge, expertise, information systems or time to manage the billing process. Most Maine school districts reported that they do not bill MaineCare for all eligible services due to the system's complexity, concerns about potential audits and penalties, and the considerable time and effort required to recover even a portion of the costs.

On its own, Maine may lack the resources to fully support school-based mental health services. However, with access to federal Medicaid funding, up to 63% to 70% of these costs could be covered. Without this assistance, local districts are left to bear the full financial burden—often depending solely on property taxes. This legislation would open the door to tens of millions in federal funds for Maine schools, helping ensure students receive essential mental health support while relieving pressure on local budgets.

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions.