

Maine Education Association

Jesse Hargrove President | Beth French Vice President | Jaye Rich Treasurer
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Testimony

In Support Of

LD 1097: An Act to Provide De-Escalation and Behavior Intervention Training for School Personnel

Jesse Hargrove, President, Maine Education Association

Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

April 23rd, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

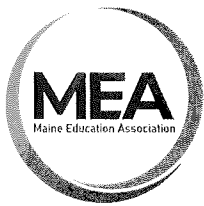
My name is Jesse Hargrove, I am a high school social studies teacher on leave to serve as Maine Education Association President. The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators. Our members include teachers and other educators in nearly every public school in the state, full-time faculty and other professional and support staff in both the University of Maine and Community College systems, and thousands of retired educators.

I offer this testimony today on behalf of the MEA in SUPPORT of LD 1097, *An Act to Provide De-escalation and Behavior Intervention Training for School Personnel*.

For over 8 years I worked as a teacher of students with Special Needs. Many of my students required academic support, literacy strategies, and math approaches. Others were developing adaptive living and pre-vocational skills. I also worked with students in the behavioral program, many of whom were dealing with significant trauma and social maladaptation. These groups of students had very different academic needs, all had moments of genius and generosity, and they all needed compassion. They were all kids, and they all made mistakes – their language, their behavior, coping strategies. They were learning. Many struggled. They were stressed. We were stressed. It was extremely important to remember, it wasn't a contest, there was nothing gained by winning. De-escalation was the goal.

Fifteen years later this lesson is even more important. Recent studies show that educators across roles are managing extremely high rates challenging student behavior, however the incidence is as prevalent among the general population as it is among students receiving special education supports. In addition, most educators report that they have not received professional development or lacking confidence in the behavioral training supports to manage daily student behaviors. The result is a reliance on punitive measures that exacerbate or elevate behavior.¹ There is demonstrated the need for systemic

¹ Scheibel, Wilkinson, Fairman, & Tariq, (March 2025) *Maine K-12 Educator and Administrator Experiences Managing Challenging Student Behavior*, Maine Education Policy Research Institute, University of Maine Orono, ME



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improvements to support students in developing the social and academic skills to be successful. We believe in a multipronged approach, with this bill being just one avenue.

Addressing student behavior is consistently one of our top training requests as an organization. We have hundreds of members that have engaged or are engaging in our online professional development platform on *Responding to Challenging Behaviors: Root Cause Analysis for Education Support Professionals*. This demonstrates that our educators are hungry and willing to engage in this work. While we are happy to support educators in their professional journey and efforts to improve, we know that more is needed. Educators, and the students they serve, benefit more from sustained professional development programs that include evidence-based practices, modeling, and coaching than from stand-alone opportunities². This bill codifies efforts for systemic fixes in this direction, and we look forward to working with education leaders on continued improvements to our professional development program. I'm happy to address any questions.

² Brock and Carter (2013), *Effects of a Professional Development Package to Prepare Special Education Paraprofessionals to Implement Evidence-Based Practice*, Journal of Special Education May 2013