

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

My name is Patricia Hopkins, and I am the Superintendent of MSAD 11. I reside in West Gardiner, and I'm here today to testify in strong support of LD 1248.

In my district, we are witnessing a growing trend of severe dysregulated behavior among our youngest students, particularly those in grades K through 3. These behaviors—hitting, biting, spitting, screaming, swearing—stem from trauma and are deeply distressing for the student in crisis. But they also have ripple effects: disrupting learning, causing distress for staff, and exposing classmates to secondary trauma.

Let me tell you about a third grader I'll call John. John lives with his father. His mother is inconsistently in his life. When asked to follow a simple direction, he can spiral into a dysregulated episode—screaming, spitting, and hitting adults—all in full view of his peers. On good days, staff can escort John to a quiet space where he's supported by an adult who helps him calm down and process what happened. But on bad days, if he refuses to go voluntarily, we're left helpless. He runs the halls, continues the behavior, and under current law, because he doesn't meet the threshold of causing "serious physical injury," staff cannot legally guide him out of public spaces to maintain his dignity and reduce further disruption.

Now consider Mike, a first grader who recently transferred schools due to a family move. Though his behavior plan followed him, the relationships and trust did not. On day one, he punched a teacher, threatened her life, threw chairs, and destroyed classmates' work. Still, this doesn't qualify as "serious physical injury" because outside medical assistance is not warranted. So he remains in classrooms and hallways, highly dysregulated, while other children watch in fear and confusion. We've received letters from concerned parents—some now considering homeschooling.

These children are not "bad kids." They are hurting. They are dealing with trauma. And our staff are doing everything possible to support them with compassion and structure.

LD 1248 is a simple but vital change. It would allow trained staff to escort a student to a private, quiet space *before* behavior escalates further—always with an adult present to support the child. In some cases, it allows us to hold space until a parent can arrive and help with de-escalation. This bill helps us preserve the child's dignity, reduce classroom trauma, and protect the learning environment for all.

I urge you to support LD 1248 so that we can respond to students in crisis in a way that is safe, humane, and supportive of their healing—not just reactive to injury.

Thank you.