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Testimony of Rep. Lydia Crafts presenting
LD 1398, An Act Regarding Behavioral Health Support for Students in Public Schools
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Lydia Crafts and I represent House District 46, which includes Bristol, Damariscotta, Monhegan Plantation, Newcastle and Nobleboro. Today, I am pleased to present **LD 1398, An Act Regarding Behavioral Health Support for Students in Public Schools**.

According to the 2021 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, 35.9% of high school students and 29.6% of middle school students surveyed reported symptoms of clinical depression. 18.5% of high school students and 20% of middle school students seriously contemplated suicide. These statistics, sadly, don't surprise staff working in our public schools because they witness the daily struggles of young people in their classrooms.

Having worked as a social worker in Maine's public schools for the last 10 years, I have supported children who have lost parents to overdoses, offered showers to rural unhoused students who otherwise bathe in the lake in November, and have filled backpacks with food, clothing and hygiene supplies on Friday afternoons. All of these struggles decrease a child's ability to receive and retain new information and skills.

In most schools, teachers and support staff are often the first line of contact with students in schools. The goal of this bill is to enable teachers the opportunity to refer students to counselors and mental health providers who can streamline resources, get families connected with help and offer direct counseling support. This will provide students the help they need and allow teachers to focus on teaching.

This bill reduces student-to-clinical mental health provider and student-to-school counselor ratios for efficiency in salary calculation and benefit costs in the essential programs and services school funding formula. The creation of these student to staff ratios establishes a minimum requirement to allow students to access supportive educational programming and individualized behavioral health supports while at school. Maine's children deserve access to the support they need to

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thrive in school and LD 1398 helps us reach this goal. Thank you for your support and I'm happy to answer any questions.