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Testimony of Whitney A Parrish Perry

American Heart Association

In Support of LD 587

An Act for Athletic Emergency Action Plans for School-sponsored Athletic Events

[Amended Title]

May 5, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Whitney Parrish Perry, and I'm the Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association (AHA)—the nation's oldest and largest voluntary organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke, and whose mission is to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of LD 587, which has an amended title of "*An Act for Athletic Emergency Action Plans for School-sponsored Athletic Events.*" AHA extends our gratitude to Senator Rafferty for sponsoring this important legislation, and for working tirelessly to ensure the safety and health of Maine students on and off the field.

BACKGROUND

More than 356,000 people experience cardiac arrest outside of a hospital in the United States each year. Without the proper response from people nearby, **90% of these incidents of cardiac arrest will result in death.** It is estimated that about 23,000 children under the age of 18 experience cardiac arrest outside of a hospital annually and that about **40% of these incidents are sports-related.**

Cardiac arrest is the leading cause of death for student athletes. It doesn't have to be, though. Appropriate emergency response tools, like cardiac emergency response plans (CERPs) or emergency action plans (EAPs), laypeople trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and ready access to automated emergency defibrillators (AEDs) can **raise survival rates by 50% or more.**



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While many acute medical emergencies are rare, **they are all devastating events that demand immediate, precise action.** Codifying athletic EAPs ensures that preparation for the unthinkable is not left to chance—but instead becomes an expected and routine standard across the state.

Many states that have passed legislation like this (18 with requirements for school-sponsored athletics; 10 with requirements for schools) have done so because a student has tragically died on an athletic field or other sports venue. Today, **you have the opportunity to save lives** by strengthening the safety net for students engaged in school athletics. By passing this bill, you will better position Maine in continuing to strengthen cardiac emergency response in schools across the state.

MAINE CONTEXT

Currently, the Maine Department of Education (MEDOE) requires each school board annually to approve a comprehensive health and safety and emergency management plan that meets nationally recognized practices and is developed by the school unit administration working collaboratively with appropriate stakeholders. However, this plan does not explicitly name or require an athletic EAP, which is a **written, rehearsed plan that documents and provides guidelines for emergency response planning for a catastrophic injury situation in an athletics or sports-related setting.**

LD 587, as amended, does the following to fill this gap:

- (1) It requires that a school board **approve an athletic emergency action plan** that addresses the appropriate use of school personnel in response to an individual experiencing sudden cardiac arrest or a similar life-threatening emergency at a school-sponsored athletic event; and
- (2) It requires that each school athletic venue **have an automated external defibrillator (AED) available for use.** This means that an AED must be available to each venue in use at the time of use, e.g. a field hockey field location must have access to an AED commensurate to the access a football field location has—including if the games or practices are happening at the same time.

Additionally, the bill allows for schools to accept gifts, grants, and donations, including in-kind donations, for the purchase of AEDs that meet standards set by the Food and Drug Administration, as well as for the cost of maintenance and training school personnel on its



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use. However, a school may choose to coordinate with local emergency medical services, for example, to ensure an AED is available for use at its athletics venues where student athletes are practicing or competing in school-sponsored events.

As noted, **LD 587 is being presented in an amended form.** The introduction of this amendment acknowledges that more information is needed to move forward with codifying similar emergency response plans in schools. Many school athletics programs and departments already have documentation of clear protocols, assigned roles, and AED access in place. For a variety of reasons, they may also require fewer AEDs at any given time than all education settings. As we take inventory of current AED access across our schools, **requiring athletic EAPs now builds the foundation for eventually implementing cardiac emergency response plans (CERPs) in all education settings.** LD 587 closes a critical gap in emergency response protocol requirements, and it signals our collective commitment to safeguarding students' lives through proven, achievable practices that empower communities to act quickly and confidently when seconds matter the most.

When schools and athletics programs establish robust emergency action plans and integrate lifesaving skills into everyday culture and life, students, coaches, educators, and others grow more resilient and prepared, and they gain the confidence needed to recognize and respond to cardiac arrest and other life-threatening emergencies—whether they're in school, on the basketball court, or at the grocery store. Together, we are increasing the odds of survival and empowering communities to become healthier, safer, and more responsive.

We strongly urge the committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 587, to take a decisive step to enhance and protect the safety and well-being of student athletes and communities across Maine.

Thank you for your time, attention, and consideration. I am very happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Whitney Parrish Perry, Government Relations Director



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