

Cc: Janet Rivard <jrivard@brunswicksd.org>

Subject: Bill LD2046, SP0839--An Act to Update Certain Duties Regarding Student Health Related to Communicable and Infectious Disease

This message originates from outside the Maine Legislature.

Dear Senator Rafferty and Secretary Grant,

The Maine Association of School Nurses (MASN) Board of Directors is writing to express our professional concerns regarding the proposed language in An Act to Update Certain Duties Regarding Student Health Related to Communicable and Infectious Disease. As the frontline healthcare providers in Maine's educational system, we believe the proposed changes may inadvertently compromise student safety and create procedural confusion within our schools. Our concerns are centered on the following points:

**1. Clinical Judgment vs. Symptom Observation** The proposed language suggests that unlicensed, non-medical school personnel would be responsible for identifying signs and symptoms of infectious or communicable diseases. While non-medical staff can certainly observe and report basic symptoms, there is a significant difference between reading a list of symptoms and applying clinical judgment. School nurses possess the specialized education, clinical expertise, and critical thinking skills required to assess signs and symptoms of health problems and determine when a situation warrants escalation.

**2. Clarity of Responsibility and Protocol** The current proposal "muddies the water" regarding who is ultimately responsible for the reporting of suspected infectious diseases. In the school setting, a clear chain of command is vital for public health. It should remain the duty of the school nurse—or another school-designated health professional—to evaluate the health of a student and notify the appropriate members of school administration.

**3. Alignment with Existing Guidelines** Maine school districts already follow established, evidence-based protocols for reporting suspected or confirmed cases of communicable diseases. These processes are developed in close alignment with the Maine CDC and the Maine Department of Education. Introducing new, overlapping, or ambiguous language risks disrupting these existing workflows and could lead to inconsistent reporting across districts.

**4. The Referral Process and Student Safety** When a student is suspected of having a communicable disease, they should be referred to a medical professional, such as their Primary Care Physician (PCP) or an Emergency Department, with the guidance and support of a school nurse. A school nurse acts as the vital link between the school and the broader healthcare system; bypassing this clinical expertise in the decision-making process may lead to unnecessary panic for families or, conversely, a failure to identify serious public health risks.

While we understand the intent behind the proposed language, we strongly believe that school health personnel must remain central to any decision-making process involving communicable diseases. We urge the committee to reconsider the proposed language changes in this act to ensure the health and safety of all Maine students.

Respectfully,

Janneke Strickland, on behalf of The Board of Directors Maine Association of School Nurses



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## **RESOURCES**

Local Assistance, Information and Services for Maine

**<https://211maine.org/> or dial 211**

Maine Crisis Hotline: 1-888-568-1112

Suicide & Crisis Hotline /or dial 988

Be There For ME

Vaccines For Children: Maine Locations