

Carey Hotaling  
Freeport  
LD 394

Senator Rafferty and the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

I have been an educator my whole career, and was a middle school science teacher from 1995-2021. During my years as a teacher I saw my students in the beginning of their most volatile stage of discovery. Being a teenager has always been wrought with self and community exploration. Because teen brains are wired for social interaction, often they get most of their emotional support from their peers. However, if a child is feeling particularly vulnerable or confused, we are lucky when they want to seek out the guidance of a trained professional. Teens will not seek out an adult if they feel their conversations are not in confidence.

The work on the LD 394, DOE Chapter 117 has already gone through the full process at the DOE to define and clarify the role of a school counselor or social worker. The school personnel are certified, educated, have degrees, and care about the whole student body. As a parent, I mostly was concerned with my own children, and didn't fully understand the needs of the whole student body. These professionals are helping with the significant struggles teens are having in this moment in time. Rather than pulling away supports as children discover themselves, we should be adding supports.

I believe in the privacy laws that we have for those over 18, and I believe that we need to protect those rights for students under 18 as well. If the child in question is in clear and imminent danger of harming themselves or if they need significant new care team members, this information is shared. If not, please model what is being done for adults - privileged communication exists between a client and a provider. Please treat our children not as mini-adults, but full human beings with rights to have their thoughts shared when they give consent.

Thank you for your consideration,  
Carey Hotaling, Freeport, Maine  
Retired Falmouth Middle School Teacher