

Ashley Kuntz  
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LD 394

To the committee: I am a resident of Hollis, Maine, a mom of three children, and a law student. I have also worked extensively with at-risk youth and adults throughout the state. I am writing to support LD 394.

Having the support of at least one trusted adult is vital to children's long-term success and improves mental health. Sadly -- but realistically -- many children do not have a trusted adult in their family, and some endure physical, mental, and emotional abuse and neglect in their homes. Counselors and social workers are educated, compassionate, and understand child development. Protecting communications between counselors and kids will ensure that kids can access the vital support of trusted adults without fear of retaliation or embarrassment from others in their lives. Allowing kids to trust in the confidentiality of their conversations is also an important lesson: Everyone will someday need to rely on privileged communications with a medical or mental health professional, a lawyer, or a clergyperson. Extending privileged communications to school social workers and counselors will teach kids that they can trust that professionals will safeguard their most personal information.

The United States Supreme Court has established that children's best interests are indisputably a substantial government interest.\* Simply put, government bodies must work to protect kids' interests. Ensuring that all Maine children can trust and rely on an adult in their lives is essential to kids' well-being. Please vote to support LD 394.

\*See *Palmore v. Sidoti*