



January 11, 2024

Testimony in Support of LD 2002:  
An Act to Provide Incentives to Schools That Contract for Certain  
Social Work and Family Therapy Services

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Gay Anne McDonald and I am the Executive Director for the Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities (MADSEC). On behalf of the MADSEC Legislative Committee, I am providing testimony in support of LD 2002: An Act to Provide Incentives to Schools That Contract for Certain Social Work and Family Therapy Services.

MADSEC strongly encourages the Committee to support LD 2002. Our state is facing a significant mental health crisis and as you are well aware, data indicate that Maine youth are experiencing unprecedented levels of anxiety, depression, and trauma. Currently, school administrative districts are facing both fiscal and provider shortages to meet this critical need and LD 2002 would assist SAUs in expanding behavioral health services for our Maine students. School districts would certainly welcome funding to assist in this critical need and would suggest that even more funding is needed.

It is imperative that our state prioritize greater access to mental health services for our youth. Research indicates students are much more likely to access mental health services within the natural school environment and that the provision of services within the school setting reduces outside barriers for youth to access these critical services. LD 2002 is a step in the right direction with its team approach and funding availability.

Research also shows that evidence-based intervention increases student engagement, school attendance, and positive peer interactions while decreasing disruptive and withdrawal behaviors. Currently, Maine students' mental health needs are outpacing supports and services and it is undeniable that the time is now to prioritize the mental health needs of our children and young adults and to act upon that need.

In closing, MADSEC urges the Committee to vote 'ought to pass as amended' and recommends the Committee revise bill text to broaden language to "behavioral health service providers" or similar language rather than a specific listing to allow for a greater provider pool in the provision of these critical services for our Maine students. Thank you for your time and commitment to the well-being of our youth.

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