

Janet T. Mills  
Governor

Jeanne M. Lambrew, Ph.D.  
Commissioner



Maine Department of Health and Human Services  
Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention  
11 State House Station  
286 Water Street  
Augusta, Maine 04333-0011  
Tel; (207) 287-8016; Fax (207) 287-9058  
TTY: Dial 711 (Maine Relay)

April 6, 2021

Senator Ned Claxton, Chair  
Representative Michele Meyer, Chair  
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: LD 979 - An Act To Expand Maine's School-based Health Centers

Dear Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

This letter is to provide information about LD 979, *An Act To Expand Maine's School-based Health Centers*, and the potential impact of the proposed legislation, if enacted. This bill appropriates \$600,000 from the Fund for a Healthy Maine per year for the next two years to expand the number of School Based Health Centers (SBHCs) in Maine through a request for proposals process that prioritizes those proposals demonstrating commitment to reducing health disparities based on race, ethnicity or tribal status.

The Maine Center of Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) offers the following information for consideration.

Maine's School Based Health Centers (SBHCs), represent a vital aspect of the Maine CDC's Adolescent and School Health Program a currently provide medical and behavioral health services to more than 4,000 middle and high school students. Currently, Maine CDC funds 15 SBHCs located within eight school districts across the State. These SBHCs serve populations of youth who may experience barriers to receiving needed medical and behavioral health services, including those who are low-income or live in underserved communities. In the 2019-2020 school year, more than 50% of students receiving care qualified for MaineCare, and an additional 8% reported being uninsured.

The expansion of SBHCs would promote access to necessary care among adolescents and ensure that young people remain connected to health services as they enter adulthood, especially those students in underserved areas and limited access to services. Maine SBHCs provide services to all students, regardless of insurance status or ability to pay, providing a medical home for students who would not otherwise have access to care. They improve access to health care for children in rural areas, increase time spent learning in school by reducing travel to regular health appointments, improve follow-up compliance, and better serve adolescents.<sup>1</sup> Preventative care and health counseling provided by SBHCs emphasize healthy behaviors that reduce the risk of

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<sup>1</sup> Arenson, M., Hudson, P. J., Lee, N., & Lai, B. (2019). The Evidence on School-Based Health Centers: A Review. *Global pediatric health*, 6, 2333794X19828745. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2333794X19828745>

serious health problems later in life. This approach includes focus on avoiding or reducing tobacco and substance use, healthy eating and physical activity. Additionally, SBHCs benefit families by providing access to medical and behavioral health care during the school day, alleviating the need for caregivers to take time off from work to transport children to appointments. SBHC utilization has been associated with improved academic outcomes, such as improved GPAs, attendance, grade promotion, college preparation, and reduced rates of suspensions.<sup>2</sup>

School Based Health Centers effectively ensure that youth have access to prevention programs, accessible health services, and supportive school environments, promoting wellbeing into adulthood. That said, any expansion should be considered in the context of the state budget.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. The Maine CDC is available to provide additional details for the Committee's consideration and to participate in the work session.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nancy Beardsley".

Nancy Beardsley, Deputy Director  
Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention

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<sup>2</sup> Knopf JA, Finnie RK, Peng Y, Hahn RA, Truman BI, Vernon-Smiley M, Johnson VC, Johnson RL, Fielding JE, Muntaner C, Hunt PC, Phyllis Jones C, Fullilove MT, Community Preventive Services Task Force. *Am J Prev Med.* 2016 Jul; 51(1):114-26.