



Testimony of Rita Furlow, Senior Policy Analyst
Maine Children's Alliance
Before the Joint Standing Committee on
Health and Human Services
An Act To Expand Maine's School-based Health Centers
LD 979
April 6, 2021

Senator Claxton and Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Rita Furlow. I am the Senior Policy Analyst at the Maine Children's Alliance, and I am here today to provide testimony related to LD 979, An Act To Expand Maine's School-based Health Centers. The Maine Children's Alliance is a statewide non-partisan, non-profit research and advocacy organization whose mission is to promote sound public policies to improve the lives of children, youth, and families in Maine.

When we ensure that all children have equal opportunity for healthy growth and development, we are making long-term investments in the future prosperity of our state. At the Maine Children's Alliance, we recognize that foundations of lifelong health are established during childhood. If we wish to improve health outcomes and reduce chronic disease in Maine, we need to strengthen the foundations of health in our children.

We strongly support the expansion of school-based health centers as a way to keep children healthy. These health centers are a powerful tool for improving access to health care for children and adolescents who experience disparities in outcomes because of their race, ethnicity, family income, or geography. They provide easy access to age-appropriate health care for patients at a time and place where they are - in school - creating a space where education and health intersect.

When integrated services like medical, behavioral, dental, and vision care are placed in schools, alongside important prevention programs that help to address tobacco and other substance use, it is more likely that young people have an equal opportunity to learn, grow, and reach their full potential. In a state like Maine, where childhood poverty and food insecurity already create barriers for educational attainment, we must continue to invest in programs that reduce challenges to accessing preventive and primary health care services. School-based health centers also provide important opportunities for collaboration on health-related issues in their communities between parents, educators, health care providers, and students.

There is an additional, tangible benefit to providing health care services to students within schools. When health care is accessed there, both students and parents benefit because they don't have to

travel to receive basic but essential healthcare. This means parents don't need to miss work to bring children to doctor's appointments, and kids don't need to miss critical class time traveling to make appointments.

School based health centers help children succeed in school and in life by keeping them healthy and ready to learn. With a focus on promoting healthy lifestyles and addressing potential issues early on, we help prevent more serious negative health outcomes later in life. School-health partnerships like these health centers share a common purpose and goal — for young people to thrive in the classroom and beyond. By making health care readily available to children in schools, we recognize and invest in their health and well-being early, which benefits our public health, communities, and state both in the short and long-term.

Thank you for your consideration.