

Testimony of Lani Graham, MD, MPH
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IN SUPPORT OF LD 979

An Act To Expand Maine's School-based Health Centers

Presented by Representative Melanie Sachs of Freeport

Before the Health and Human Services Committee: April 6, 2021

Good morning, Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Committee. My name is Lani Graham. I am a family practice physician and former Chief Public Health officer for Maine. Currently I serve on the Public Health Committee for the Maine Medical Association (MMA). I am pleased to be here in support of a bill presented by my own Representative, Melanie Sachs on behalf of the MMA.

I am going to be brief because there are certain to be others testifying who are more directly in touch with school health in Maine today. However I do know Maine has a proud history of investing in school health before its significant value was recognized nationally. And, when I was asked in 1990 to cut public health initiatives as a Health Director, I determined the seven school-based health centers we had then should be preserved.

School-based health centers are uniquely positioned to make a real difference in the health and school success of the next generation. The services provided include medical and nutritional screening, provision of essential medications, treatment of minor ailments, but also referral for more significant health problems. A school based health center may offer the best, or even only chance, that a health problem will be addressed.

By working to assure that all students are healthy, school-based health centers also enhance chances that those served will complete high school. School-based health center access can be the difference between a difficult life and a successful one.

In summary, school-based health centers are an important public health intervention. But I do want to say a word about funding. While the funding proposed is completely appropriate, as is the proposed source, the Fund for Healthy Maine, I do worry about viewing that Fund as a “bottomless source” of funding for public health interventions, without replenishing and increasing that fund. We remain in the midst of the worst public health crisis of our time, made worse by our lack of preparedness as a nation and a state. In our state, many public health problems beyond Covid and School-based health centers must be addressed. The Fund for Healthy Maine should have solid, certain funding, dedicated to the many public health needs of this state, now and into the future. I hope that this committee will work toward that end.

Thank you for your attention. I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.