

TESTIMONY

In Support of

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

John Kosinski, Government Relations Director, Maine Education Association

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

April 6th, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and other esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is John Kosinski, and I am here on behalf of the Maine Education Association (MEA) to testify in support of LD 979, An Act To Expand Maine's School-based Health Centers. The MEA represents 24,000 educators in the state of Maine, including teachers, other certified professionals, and support staff in nearly every public school in the state.

The MEA recognizes the valuable role school-based health centers play in supporting the overall health and well-being of Maine's students. Currently, according to the Maine Division of Disease Prevention, we have 16 school-based health centers operating in our public schools.¹ These health centers provide critical services to students, while also working on efforts to educate students on healthy habits, the dangers of smoking and drugs, and so much more.

Last session, this Committee and the Legislature passed two bills related to school-based health centers. One bill, LD 392 was intended to rectify an error by the previous Governor that removed funding for school-based health centers.² That bill was signed by the Governor and became law. Another bill, LD 836 was also passed by the Committee and the Legislature, and that bill too was signed by the Governor. LD 836 was designed to augment state funding for school-based health centers.³

The MEA recognizes that students learn best when they are healthy, happy, and engaged. School-based health centers help make sure our students are healthy by providing on-site services to students who might otherwise not

¹ Please see [Adolescent and School Health - Division of Disease Prevention - Maine CDC: DHHS Maine](#)

² To learn more about LD 392 from the 129th Legislative Session, please see: [Summary \(maine.gov\)](#)

³ To learn more about LD 836 from the 129th Legislative Session, please see: [Summary \(maine.gov\)](#)

be able to access services such as screenings, examinations, and mental health supports, especially depression and suicide prevention.

The MEA strongly encourages this Committee to pass LD 979 not only because of the valuable services these school-based health centers provide, but also because of the moment we are living in. While we want to make sure students have access to basic health care, care that may have been delayed due to the pandemic, we are also deeply concerned about the overall mental health of students as we emerge from this crisis. Parents regularly report concerns about the mental impact this pandemic may have on their students – the effects of isolation, the disruption of routines, and ongoing fears of living through a pandemic. The pandemic has certainly challenged many adults, and the impact can be felt even more acutely among young adolescents.

In short, school-based health centers were valuable to students and families before the COVID 19 pandemic, and we appreciate the bipartisan support of efforts to expand them last session. But during and after this pandemic, these services for students will be of even greater importance to the overall success, well-being, and health of Maine's students. We hope the Committee will vote ought to pass on LD 979.

Thank you for your time and for your service to the students of Maine.