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Testimony of Rep. Rebecca Millett presenting
LD 979, An Act to Expand Maine's School-based Health Centers
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Good morning Sen. Claxton, Rep. Meyer and esteemed members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. I am Representative Rebecca Millett, representing House District 30 which is most of Cape Elizabeth, I am here today to support **LD 979, An Act To Expand Maine's School-based Health Centers.**

I have served for the last nine years on the Legislature's Education and Cultural Affairs Committee and prior to that, I served on the Cape Elizabeth School Board for more than six years. Throughout that time, I have heard over and over again from teachers, parents, education policy experts, even business groups, about the importance of students being in class for instruction, and of the loss that happens when a student is absent from class.

One important way to cut down on missed class time is to ensure that students have quick and easy access to medical care when they need it — and school-based health centers are the most effective way of providing that. Testimonies from students and providers on prior SBHC bills offered their personal experiences with the amount of time that students aren't missing because of SBHCs and I hope we will hear from them again. From a policymaker's perspective, I know that we in Maine cannot afford to have one student missing class time and lagging behind when we can do something to prevent it.

Some statistics:

Of students who miss 2-4 days in September, half go on to miss nearly a month of school. By 6th grade, chronic absence becomes a leading indicator that a student will drop out of high school. Missing 10 percent of school days negatively affects a student's academic performance. Students living in high levels of poverty are four times more likely to be chronically absent (missing 10 percent or more of school days) for reasons beyond their control -- including unstable housing, unreliable transportation, and lack of access to health care. That last point is exactly what we can take action on through LD 979.

I know I'm not the first person to come before this committee and mention the impending demographic winter in our state. It is absolutely dire. School-based health centers are a key component of helping ensure that our kids are healthy and ready to enter the workforce when they finish with school. Having them be ready to work is of absolute importance to Maine's current and future economy.

I hope you will join me in supporting LD 979.