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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Representative Melanie Sachs, sponsor of LD 979, “An Act To Expand Maine's School-based Health Centers”, before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

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

My name is Melanie Sachs, and I am honored to represent House District 48, which includes Freeport and part of Pownal. I am here as the sponsor of LD 979, “An Act To Expand Maine's School-based Health Centers.”

LD 979 proposes to bring expand the number of school-based health centers, which is a highly effective, clinically proven model, to even more areas of our state, while addressing disparities in our health system. Some of the members of this Committee may recognize this bill as similar to LD 836, which received a strong majority “Ought to Pass” report out of this committee in the 129th Legislature, but unfortunately died upon adjournment. LD 836 was identified that following summer by the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Maine Tribal populations as one of 46 bills (out of 454 that were left on adjournment) which could truly have made a difference in addressing both lack of access, and structural racism and inequality, in our health care system. I worked with several members of the Permanent Commission to add language to the bill presented before you today.

The testimony from the many school, community, research, and health professionals that you will hear today reinforce the value of school-based health centers. Access to preventative care, in a setting familiar to students, in concert with other community health resources, leads to better health outcomes for children. Prevention education, injury assessment, screenings and immunizations, and acute and chronic illness diagnostics are all services provided by SBHCs. We know that behavioral health services for Maine students, which were already under-resourced, will be of paramount importance as we move forward in this post-pandemic period.

School-based health centers have behavioral health clinicians on site, which means earlier identification and support for these students, and better access to services.

I have been a licensed clinical social worker for over twenty-five years. I came to the Legislature as many of you did, because I want to make the world better for children in our state. That is a goal that I know is shared by so many of us serving in the 130th Legislature, across all towns and party affiliations. I know first-hand the impact that the lack of access to care, for both health and mental health services, has upon children. School-based health centers are a cost effective, high impact, proven model that can significantly improve the lives of kids in our communities. I urge you to unanimously support an “Ought to Pass” recommendation for LD 979.