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Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer & members of the Health and Human Services Committee --

I'm a Pediatrician with over 30 years of history practicing in Kennebec County. Many of my parents and a few of my former patients have served in the legislature over these decades, which has been quite an honor. I am representing the Maine Chapter of the AAP in support of LD 979 which proposes to expand grant funding for school-based health centers.

I must say that I was wary of the idea of SBHC's when the concept emerged in the 1990's, seeming to be in conflict with the idea of a "medical home." My opinion has changed over the years. While clinics in different settings have very different roles, the ones in my area high schools have done a great job of complementing office-based practices. They also share in the use of an EMR system that integrates with most of the primary care offices in the region so that information is shared seamlessly.

A substantial proportion of the activity of SBHC's is in the mental health arena, along with keeping teens with minor issues from ending up in the ER in the evening by providing daytime access. Many of these minor issues are functional in nature, related to the stresses endured by teens, and easily recognized as such by SBHC personnel who know the child. If they had ended up in the ER, costly diagnostic explorations would have been the result.

Confidential birth control services are also available, contributing to the avoidance of unwanted pregnancies. Teens who are struggling with weight issues can monitor themselves and get basic nutritional counseling without expensive office visits.

While there is a process for billing patients who have coverage, these clinics also provide a safety net for free care for patients who otherwise would seek medical attention for financial reasons (uninsured, or high deductibles).

As part of our state's strategy to intervene early with mental health disorders, avoid unnecessary medical expenses, and to get teens to practice healthy habits -- school based health centers have an essential role and should be supported.

Sincerely,

Sydney R. Sewall, MD MPH
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