



April 6, 2021

Good morning, I would like to thank members of the committee for providing me the opportunity to address you. I am here to offer testimony on LD 979.

My name is George Shaler and I am a Senior Research Associate at the Cutler Institute at the University of Southern Maine. Through a contract I have with the Maine CDC, I evaluate the school-based health centers (SBHCs) funded in part by the Maine CDC. With the exception of the 2017-18 school year when the ME CDC did not fund the ME SBHCs I have evaluated the SBHCs since 2003. All 15 of these state-funded SBHCs received a modest amount of funding from the Fund for a Healthy Maine's Community/School Grants section to cover uncompensated care – care to students that are uninsured and those who were unable to pay. *By approving this modest expansion outlined in LD 979, more schools would be able to partner with medical and behavioral health providers in providing timely care to adolescents.*

**This small amount of funding has a significant impact on youth, schools and communities statewide.** I would like to provide some information on ME SBHCs. These services have been especially meaningful for many students during the pandemic.

#### **What are School Based Health Centers (SBHC)?**

School-based health centers are located in the school building or on a school campus. They are like a doctor's office in school. SBHCs are staffed by multi-disciplinary teams of nurse practitioners, physicians, mental health professionals and other health personnel, who provide consistent care for a student throughout his/her school years. Through this team-based approach, which includes collaboration with the school nurse, the centers offer a holistic approach to care.

SBHCs provide the following services:

- Routine physical exams
- Diagnosis of acute and chronic illness
- Treatment of minor injuries
- Screenings & immunizations
- Health education
- Mental health services:
  - Depression & Suicide prevention

Let me provide you with some basic statistics about SBHCs in the 2019-20 school year, a school year interrupted by the pandemic.

Total student population served: **10,727 students (2019-20 school year)**

Number of students enrolled in SBHCs: **3,292 students** (31% of the total student population). This figure would have been higher had it not been for the pandemic.

Number of students using SBHC services: **1,461 students** (44% of the students enrolled). Historically this figure is above 50% in non-pandemic years.



**Total number of SBHC visits/encounters: 8,834**

Number of student users who received a comprehensive health risk assessment: **797** (55% of all users).

Number of students using SBHC services who received a diagnosis of depression: **782 students**.

Number of enrollees identified as needing mental health care who receive it at the SBHC: **473 (92%)** of 516.

**SBHC minimize missed work time for parents.**

There are many Mainers who work in jobs in which paid time off is minimal, or not offered at all – especially if they are self-employed or work in a small business. So while reduced worker productivity is one impact of having to leave to care for a sick child, a more significant concern is lost wages for those who have to take time out of their work day to care for their child.

**What is the quality of care at SBHC?**

SBHCs provide quality health care that is geared towards adolescents, and meets their needs in a manner that is appropriate for their age and developmental stage. Every SBHC has a medical sponsor, which is a medical entity (hospital, FQHC or independent primary care practice most often) as well as a medical director who provides oversight to the SBHC. This oversight assures that the care a student gets at their SBHC is no different from if they went into the primary care office. And since the service is provided in a space that is convenient, whether in person or via telehealth, for the students, they are more likely to utilize those services and have their needs met in a timely manner—instead of delaying care until it becomes a crisis or urgent need. Just as important, SBHCs minimize the loss of instruction time, keeping students in their classroom seats and engaged in learning.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Yours,

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