

Senator Ned Claxton, Representative Michele Meyer and members of the Joint Health and Human Services Committee, this testimony is in favor of LD979 An Act to expand Maine's school-based health centers.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today. I am a mother of two graduates from the Maranacook High School in Readfield, Maine. The onsite Maranacook school based health center has been in existence since 1992. The high school is 14 miles one way from our home and 26 miles one way from my work. If we did not have the services of the health center, a call from the school for a sick child would have resulted in a fifty mile or more round trip to get the child to the doctor and then either home or back to school. This would have been time lost from school and work for multiple members of our family. The school based health center met the health and emotional needs of my children while at school in many ways. They developed relationships with caring adults; received care onsite when it was needed and received any necessary follow up appointments. The nurse practitioner had access to their electronic health record and their primary care provider and specialists were aware of their medical care received at the school-based health center.

Accessing the health center during the school day when needed contributed to them staying in school and engaged in their learning. Our son was diagnosed with asthma as a child and had frequent respiratory and ear infections. He was aware of the onset of subtle symptoms and if diagnosed and treated early it often would maybe keep him off antibiotics, able to stay in school and participate in activities. He grew to understand prevention and health maintenance. If medications were needed, the nurse practitioner would order the medication and I could pick it up on the way home from work. I rarely missed work for unscheduled health care provider appointments. The health center provided peace of mind for me and my husband.

In addition to being seen for acute care I knew they could trust the care givers at the health center to respect their confidentiality and answer their questions, provide accurate information and services. As you know adolescents do not always tell their parents everything going on or ask sensitive question. The SBHC was accessible and the staff caring and trustworthy.

As a health care professional, I understand the health and economic challenges that many Maine families face today. Nearly 1 in 4 Maine high school students has experienced four or more ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) as reported in the 2019 Maine Integrated Youth Risk Survey. Diseases of despair such as suicide and substance use disorder are rising. Maine is number one in the nation for diagnosed anxiety in children. The pandemic has impacted the mental health of many children due to extended periods of isolation and less connections with caring adults outside of the home and in the community. Families face gaps in insurance coverage and large insurance deductibles that keep families from seeking needed health care and preventive care. These diminished resources increase the risk of substance use and even the loss of many young lives. Research tells us there is a connection to academic improvement and better health outcomes when students can access health care at a school based health center. This small investment I am asking you to support should be replicated across Maine to support new school based health centers, thus improving the physical, emotional and behavioral health of Maine's children and our communities. Maine children deserve better.

Respectfully submitted,



Kini-Ana Tinkham

Manchester, Maine
kini.tinkham@gmail.com
207-504-0261

