

March 27, 2023

LD 829 – Ought to Pass
An Act to Improve Behavioral Health Support for Students in Public Schools

Testimony submitted on behalf of NASW – Maine Chapter

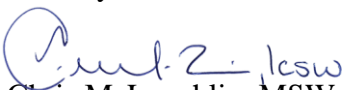
Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, greetings. My name is Chris McLaughlin, MSW, LCSW, and I am the Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers, Maine Chapter.

I applaud Representative Lydia Crafts, a fellow social worker, on her vision for LD 829. It is not new information to any of you that Maine's students are in the midst of a mental health crisis. This committee knows all too well of the troubling statistics here in Maine on youth mental health and wellness including rates of depression, suicidal ideation, and adverse childhood experiences facing students of all ages. Wait times for community-based services such as outpatient counseling, medication management, case management, and in-home behavioral health supports are at an all time high while youth can spend upwards of several weeks in their local emergency department waiting for one of just a handful of inpatient psychiatric beds to open up (a process that might happen more expeditiously if there were available options for step-down programs for youth leaving this level of care). Whether we like it or not, schools have become some of the largest *de facto* mental health centers in our state. This is a fact.

LD 829 not only supports a more effective (and nationally recognized) ratio of students to school counselors but also introduces a similar ratio of students to school social workers...something our schools desperately need more of. This bill clarifies the amount of time each of these professionals should be spending on direct and indirect services to students and requires evidenced-based training on behavioral analysis at the district level. These components of LD 829 represent the baseline of what we must offer students and families to begin to address the immediately mental health needs impacting our youth. I urge you all to unanimously vote "Ought to Pass" on this important bill so that we can continue to invest in our young people and get to work as we fight to keep our kids safe, healthy, and alive.

Please know that you will have the full resources of NASW-ME in any subsequent work sessions or conversations you wish to have as we work together on this important issue.

Thank you!


Chris McLaughlin, MSW, LCSW
Executive Director
NASW-ME Chapter