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Inland Hospital
Maine Coast Hospital
Mayo Hospital
Mercy Hospital
Northern Light Health Foundation
Northern Light Pharmacy
Sebasticook Valley Hospital

LD 2002 An Act to Provide Incentives to Schools That Contract for Certain Social Work and Family Therapy Services

Testimony in Support January 11, 2024

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Lisa Harvey-McPherson RN. I am here today providing testimony on behalf of Northern Light Health and our member organizations speaking in support of this bill. Northern Light Health member organizations include 10 hospitals located in southern, central, eastern and northern Maine, 8 nursing facilities, air and ground ambulance, behavioral health, addiction treatment, pharmacy, primary and specialty care practices and a state-wide home care and hospice program. Ninety three percent of Maine's population lives in the Northern Light Health service area. Northern Light Health is also proud to be one of Maine's largest employers with more than 10,000 employees statewide.

Northern Light Acadia Hospital is a 100 bed licensed hospital providing comprehensive inpatient and outpatient services caring for the people of Maine. Patients throughout the State are served by Acadia behavioral health clinicians, many residing in northern and eastern Maine. We offer a variety of services for children and teens. Some of the services we offer include mental health evaluation, medication management, individual and family therapy, specialized outpatient group therapy, occupational therapy, care coordination, day treatment services, inpatient treatment and school based services. On any given day, the children's demand for behavioral health services exceeds the capacity statewide. At Acadia we are actively reaching out to children in need in communities and primary care practices to expand access to care, school based health care is a important component of access.

Today, we are serving children in five Maine school districts located in Hamden/Winterport, Old Town, Orono, Pittsfield and Lee/Winn with services in approximately 18 different schools. Our services can be paid for via a contract with the school or we can bill the child's insurance provider.

In a June 2023 focus group on a grant funded school-based program we are delivering, a middle school principal shared that the Acadia services offered to the school have significantly decreased the amount of outreach that they need to do to their local crisis provider when students have been struggling emotionally at school. They highlighted the value of that for the students who did not have to leave the school for an evaluation and for the school team who were able to remain focused on academic needs while Acadia managed the psychiatric needs.

In November of 2023 we surveyed our school partners about the children's behavioral health services we provide and received strong positive feedback. Schools responded that:

- Mental health support to students has really helped them to thrive at school and allowed school staff to focus their time and efforts on helping students academically, as they have support for their mental health needs.
- Acadia services have a direct impact on our students' mental health. Students are able to process struggles and receive help without having to leave the building. Being embedded within the school day allows students services who might not otherwise be able to access this much needed help.
- Many of our students need to talk about their feelings and experiences to cope with academics and social life.

This bill provides ongoing funds to school administrative units for contracted social work and family therapy services for students. We strongly support this proposal.

As you consider this legislation we ask that you amend section 1 of the bill "Contract Authorized". This section of the bill lists the licensed social work and family therapy service providers authorized to provide services funded by this bill. Missing from the list are Licensed Clinical Professional Counselors (LCPC's). LCPC's are part of the team of behavioral health clinicians providing services to students in the schools supported by Acadia. It is critically important that they continue to provide this important service. We ask that the following be added to section 1 of the bill.

G. Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this important legislation.