

Testimony

LD 1335, An Act to Provide Mental Health First Aid Training to Secondary School Health Educators

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield, esteemed members of the Education Committee, I am Jay McCreight, Representative for HD 51, Harpswell, West Bath, East Brunswick. I am here today as sponsor of **LD 1335, An Act to Provide Youth Mental Health First Aid Training to Secondary School Health Educators.**

Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA)* is a national, best-practice, evidence-based certification course that empowers people with the information they need to recognize, respond to, and to have the information to guide someone with mental health needs to the appropriate help. The standards for the program have been set by the National Council for Behavioral Health and target youth ages 12 to 18.

Providing training in Youth Mental Health First Aid for educators who teach health education to our secondary school students will ensure that they have access to accurate, un-stigmatized information about what mental illness is and what supports are available locally.

Anyone who's been involved with education knows that teachers are overburdened with the increasing demands of constantly changing priorities and mandates. Also increasing, and adding significantly to that burden, are the societal, familial, and academic pressures our youth are facing and the impact these pressures have on their mental and physical well being, their academic performance, their social connectedness. We can't expect educators to fix or prevent the pressures, or treat the symptoms, but because of their caring for and contact with kids, they are already facing the impact. As many of you know, I was social worker in public schools for 20 years. Over that time, I worked alongside teachers faced with the ever increasing and ever deepening problems facing our youth.

One in five young people is diagnosed with a mental illness, and half of all lifetime cases of mental illness will develop before age 14. The stigma surrounding mental illness often prevents people from seeking help when they first experience symptoms, a significant problem because early treatment can often help to improve the long-term outcome. Through data available through the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS),** we know that across Maine, over 25% of youth report feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row, with even higher rates among minority populations. Sagadahoc County youth report the highest numbers of those experiencing suicidal thoughts. Only 22% of youth report having support from an adult, yet one proven way to help youth who are struggling with mental health issues is a relationship with at least one adult who understands what mental illness really is and who can provide adequate support that connects them with help.

Funding for YMHFA training is available through the Now Is The Time (NITT) federal grant monies through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and administered by Maine's Public Health Regional System, Project Aware grant. The grant monies provide for trainers, materials, payment for substitute teachers and subsidies for teachers who do the training on their own time. The National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine (NAMI Maine) already receives funding through the federal grant until 2018 and has already trained 105 health educators of the estimated 380 health educators statewide. The goal of this

bill is to make sure that every health educator in our secondary schools, and all of their students, have access to the benefits to be gained by this training.

Teachers receiving YMHFA training are eligible for CEUs and will fulfill the state requirement for Suicide Prevention Training (also called Gatekeeper Training).

I appreciate your attention and am happy to answer any questions.

For more information:

***Mental Health First Aid** - <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs/>

**MIYTHS is the annual, self-report tool used in public schools to track trends in student behaviors and functioning

National Council for Behavioral Health - www.nationalcouncil.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration -
- www.samhsa.gov

Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey -
- <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/samhs/osa/data/miyhs/faq.htm>

Grants -
- www.samhsa.gov/grants