

Maine Counseling Association
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Reps. Mike Thompson and John Katko introduced *the Mental Health Access Improvement Act of 2021* (the “medicare fix” bill) to the 117th US congress as H.R. 432 on January 21. Our organization has had repeated contacts with staffers of both of Maine’s Representatives, and Rep. Pingree has signed on (March 10) as a co-sponsor (one of 25 as of this date). Rep. Golden is still considering his position. Senators Stabenow and Barrasso introduced the companion legislation of the same name to the Senate on March 18 (S. 828), and the measure now has 8 co-sponsors including both of Maine’s Senators, Collins and King, who each endorsed the measure on April 15. We are thankful once again to the members of Maine’s congressional delegation for supporting this key legislation.

The Maine Counseling Association has been working collaboratively with members of the MeSCA Govt. relations committee to develop a response to LD 639 *“An Act to Improve Professional Training for School Counselors.”* In brief, this bill, if enacted, would mandate that school counselors receive a minimum of 6 hours of training specifically having to do with prevention of domestic violence and connection with DV prevention resources in Maine. After a series of discussions, MeCA (and MesCA) decided to oppose the bill and recommend that it ought not to pass based on the fact that, though we supported school counselors paying attention to domestic violence issues, we did not want a legislative mandate for specific training (of this or any other specific issue). Our two organizations worked closely together to outline our positions, and provided separate written statements and testimony to the Joint Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs during a public comment session on March 22. The bill was tabled during a committee work session on Monday, April 5, with the committee members leaning in the direction of referring this to the DOE certification office, but the measure has come off the table and was scheduled for a work session on May 3. MeCA will continue to follow the progress of this bill and give updates as they become available.

Work sessions for rulemaking with respect to LD 247 *An Act to Increase the Amount of Time School Counselors and School Social Workers Spend Providing Students Direct and Indirect Counseling* have started. The first zoom session took place on March 1, with MeCA representation involved. We went over some general guidelines, shared resources, and mapped out our work group process going forward. Bear Shea, LCSW, our DOE liaison, is coordinating this effort, which involves not only representation from MeCA but also MeSCA, Maine Universities with School Counselor preparation programs, and school Social Workers. This group will essentially develop a playbook for how LD 247 will be operationalized in schools, and may help to delineate the roles of school counselors and school social workers. MeCA will provide updates as this work progresses.

Our parent organization ACA has recently taken a stand on a number of issues relating to violence prevention and social justice, consistent with our ACA code of ethics, as has MeCA leadership. These issues include the violence at the US Capitol on January 6, violence directed

against members of the Asian American community, voter suppression laws in Georgia and other states, and the trial and conviction of former police officer Derek Chauvin in the killing of black American George Floyd. These positions have been communicated to ACA members in the “Latest News from ACA” posts and relayed to Maine Counseling Association members via email and social media links. This constitutes a welcome shift in how ACA leadership is choosing to publicly address such issues, one more in line with our stated aspirations; “ACA is built on a mission that promotes human dignity and diversity, respect, the attainment of a quality of life for all, empowerment, integrity, social justice advocacy, equity and inclusion.” Let us add our voices in our daily interactions to those of our leaders in promoting these aspirational, ethical goals, and envision ourselves as agents of change in actively promoting policies which will lead resolutely in the direction of a better, more equitable and just future..

Respectfully submitted,
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