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Paul R. LePage  
GOVERNOR

25 April 2018

The 128th Legislature of the State of Maine  
State House  
Augusta, ME

Dear Honorable Members of the 127th Legislature:

Under the authority vested in me by Article IV, Part Third, Section 2 of the Constitution of the State of Maine, I am hereby vetoing LD 1866, "An Act to Increase Youth Mental Health Awareness in Schools."

To be perfectly clear, the loss of one child to suicide is an unacceptable tragedy. For a child not to feel they have a safe place, a friend, a teacher or a professional to reach out to in their despair is unfathomable. As recently as this spring we saw two beautiful lives end when they believed their only pathway was resorting to suicide. As their families, communities, and schools reacted to these tragedies, there was an intense examination of what procedures, training, and resources were available to identify and assist our children and their parents.

In 2013, I signed into law LD 609, An Act to Increase Suicide Awareness and Prevention in Maine Public Schools. LD 609 required all public school personnel in Maine to complete Suicide Prevention Awareness training and at least two members of the school to be trained as suicide prevention gatekeepers, with larger schools required to train extra gatekeepers. The bill went on to require that these trainings must be renewed by school personnel every five years. It also said every new hire must receive this training within six months of hire. Recognizing that our children spend a great deal of time in our schools, Maine's public education system was designated as an integral repository for the training to help identify at-risk students and to provide support and direction to the professional resources available to our children and their families.

In the past year, the Legislature has put forth a number of bills regarding suicide prevention and student mental health, the goal of which was to direct the administrators in our School Administrative Units (SAUs) to be proactive rather than reactive. LD 1355, which became law in the First Regular session of the 128th Legislature, instructed SAUs to have their health instructors trained in Youth Mental Health First Aid. To their credit, some SAUs immediately sought the training, expanding it in some cases to all adults in their system. In the Second Regular Session, LD 1866 was proposed to amend the newly enacted statute, again requiring the SAUs to obtain this training to send a "we really mean this" message to SAUs. Also in this Second Regular Session, LD 1694 came before the Legislature. This bill was enacted as "Resolve, Directing the Department of Education to Adopt Protocols Designed to Prevent Youth



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Suicide.” The Amendment directed the Department to require that SAUs have protocols for suicide prevention, intervention and follow-up in place beginning with the 2019–2020 school year.

By way of background, protocols for suicide prevention and intervention have been a recommendation in Department of Education Rules since at least 2002 when the first protocol guidance was published. A new edition was published in 2009 and updates are made and shared at all trainings. Since 2013, the Maine School Suicide Prevention Protocols Development trainings have been offered to 82 school districts, with other agencies also presenting these trainings. At the time LD 1694 was presented to the Legislature, it was estimated that fewer than 25 percent of the districts had adopted Protocols for Suicide Prevention.

As parents, schools, and communities reel from the incomprehensible loss of a young life to suicide, it becomes apparent that even with the passage of laws and resolves meant to build a safety net for our at-risk students, the action necessary to do so comes slowly and sometimes not at all or only after the devastation has occurred. It should not take another statute to get our schools to do the right thing when such resources as I have described herein already exist.

For these reasons, I return LD 1866 unsigned and vetoed. I strongly urge the Legislature to sustain it.

Sincerely,



Paul R. LePage

Governor