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TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 2019

AN ACT TO EXTEND TO OTHER PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES THE SAME PROTECTIONS PROVIDED TO STATE EMPLOYEES UPON THE EXPIRATION OF CONTRACTS

Senator Bellows, Representative Sylvester, and members of the Labor and Housing Committee. I am Steven Bailey, executive director of Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association in opposition to L.D. 2019.

Our associations oppose this bill because what works for state government doesn't work for school districts. In districts, and there are more than 200 in Maine, school boards have multiple stakeholders, including staff, parents, community members, property taxpayers and above all students.

Boards negotiate unique contracts for their employees based on what is best for their teachers and other employees, and what will be supported by local taxpayers, who ultimately can reject the school budget, if it is deemed too high.

Negotiations must reflect the economic conditions at the time, which can be affected by the overall economy in the state or by the loss of major employers in a community or changes in the amount of state aid for education. If the local mill rate for education is going up substantially, the school budget can be a tough sell.

Most school contracts are for three years and circumstances can change in that time. The cost of health insurance for our employees, for example, has been a major cost driver in recent years.

The bill also mentions merit raises, and while some are given, technically we are on salary schedules that take into account years in the position and education levels.

This bill would take away our flexibility to react to local conditions when it comes to pay increases and health insurance rate increases and diminish the authority of the School Board to adopt the local budget. It also takes away the incentives for teachers and other bargaining units to settle a contract. Current practice is teachers do not move onto the next step increase until there is an agreement.

For those reasons and in support of locally elected School Boards to be the arbiters of local budgets, we urge you to reject this bill.