

TESTIMONY

In support of

LD 864: “An Act to Protect Teachers’ Privacy While Delivering Remote Instruction”

Grace Leavitt, President, Maine Education Association

Before the Joint Standing Committee on

Judiciary

April 21st, 2021

Senator Carney, Representative Hartnett, and esteemed members of the Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Grace Leavitt. I am a Spanish teacher on leave from Greely High School while serving as President of the Maine Education Association. The MEA has nearly 24,000 members—faculty and staff in our pre-K-12 public schools, our institutions of higher education, and many dedicated retired educators.

I am speaking on behalf of our members in support of LD 864: “An Act to Protect Teachers’ Privacy While Delivering Remote Instruction”.

This bill is vitally important for our teachers to be able to continue to provide remote instruction to Maine’s students during this pandemic, and possibly for some time to come. Before March 2020, I doubt that anyone would have envisioned needing such legislation.

But here we are, over a year later, and pretty early on in the current school year, it became apparent that the provisions called for in LD 864 are indeed essential.

This is what the bill does: it provides some level of protection from the following happening: a part of a proper, carefully planned lesson--part of an established curriculum--or a part of an open and balanced discussion, is recorded, taken out of context, shared and displayed on social media where a teacher, or possibly a student, is criticized, ridiculed, even threatened, by others who not only do not have knowledge of the fuller context but may also be out to undermine the teacher, the school, or even public education due to their own personal beliefs.

This bill also provides some level of protection from someone who is not the intended audience of the lesson—i.e., someone who is not a student in the class—from interrupting, and disrupting, the lesson, thereby impacting not only all of the students in the class and their right to learn, but also undermining the teacher and even potentially damaging the relationship among classmates and the established class climate.

This is what the bill does not do: it does not say that parents should not know what is being taught; it does not say that parents should not know what is happening in their child's school; it does not say that parents or guardians or other caregivers cannot assist a child with remote instruction; it does not say that a member of a household is prohibited from incidentally listening to or viewing a lesson; it does not say that others are prohibited from accessing the class if they have permission to do so.

The objections raised by those opposed to this bill demonstrate that they have not actually read the language in the bill.

They also indicate that they are unaware of a very serious incident that happened early on this school year. The scenario described above actually happened: a parent recorded a part of a lesson which was part of an established curriculum. The parent then shared it on social media, maligned the teacher and the school, others joined in and actually threatened the teacher—yes, threatened the teacher!¹

We have had reports of a household member intentionally interrupting and disrupting a classroom—and I am not referring to an unintentional and minor disruption like someone talking to another person in the background or accidentally walking behind a student and appearing on camera, but an intentional disruption where the person speaks directly to the teacher and/or to other students!

A school would not allow someone to just walk into a classroom without permission; a school would not allow someone to intentionally barge in and disrupt a lesson. Nor would a school allow someone to come in, without permission, begin recording a lesson and then share the recording, again, without permission, for their own personal agenda. A school would not allow this for in-person classes. Why should it be without repercussions when the lesson is provided remotely?

Maine's educators have done nothing less than an amazing job throughout this pandemic. Maine schools have remained open—they have provided in-person instruction while adapting to and following the six safety requirements and they have provided remote instruction for when students have not been able to be in the building, whether due to hybrid models, or episodes of quarantining, or due to parents' concerns about the virus. Many teachers have simultaneously taught students in the classroom while also teaching students who are learning remotely. To have the possibility that someone could create such a situation as the ones described in this testimony without any repercussions is not only disrespectful of the hard work our educators have been doing, it is also harmful to educators and, most of all, to our students.

Maine educators remain dedicated to providing quality instruction and to supporting students despite the incredible challenges they have been facing. Let's at least remove one of these challenges.

We urge your support of LD 864.

Thank you for your time, and I am glad to answer any questions.

¹<https://z1073.com/bangor-school-department-responds-to-recorded-zoom-lesson-hateful-comments/>

¹<https://bangordailynews.com/2020/09/09/news/bangor/bangor-teacher-faces-backlash-after-lesson-on-race-privilege-is-shared-to-pro-trump-facebook-page/>

<https://www.wabi.tv/2020/09/09/community-reaction-to-backlash-after-bangor-parents-post-video-of-online-lesson/>

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