

DATE: April 20, 2023

TO: Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs

FROM: Rebecca Buchanan, Assistant Professor of Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction,  
University of Maine

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RE: **LD 1608 An Act to Address Teacher Shortages Through Financial Assistance and Career Advancement Opportunities**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs:

I am writing to you today in support of LD 1608.

I am Rebecca Buchanan, a faculty member in teacher education at the University of Maine in Orono. I study teacher development and teacher preparation and I have worked with Maine Teacher Residency team. I, with my colleague developed the online training modules for mentor teachers who are working with the teacher residents.

Research consistently shows that residency models are innovative ways to prepare and retain educators. The intensive time working alongside a mentor teacher in a classroom has been consistently demonstrated to be one of the best preparatory models. It also helps us meet the particular needs of a state like Maine, which is both rural and geographically large. Given the teacher shortage that we are facing, innovative approaches to teacher preparation and recruitment are imperative. Funding to support both traditional candidates and non-traditional ones, which the Maine Teacher Residency currently does, will help meet the workforce needs schools are facing while simultaneously preparing highly qualified educators.

Moreover, this program also provides training, support, and compensation for mentor teachers, which is rare. All of the mentors meet monthly to discuss their mentoring practice, read scholarship about coaching and mentoring, and problem solve collaboratively. This has been a rich space for teacher leadership development as well as novice teacher support. Not only does this better prepare the mentors to support the teacher residents, but it is also invigorating to their own educational practice. I am consistently impressed with the depth of conversation and growth the mentors have shown over the course of the year. They report that these opportunities to explore the practice of mentoring and coaching together are valuable in their development. The skills they learn will both help retain them as educators, but also allow them to support their peers and other novice educators in their school communities as teacher leaders. As we seek to address the teacher shortage, we must consider the recruitment and retention of new educators as well as the retention of existing educators. Providing compensated opportunities to grow their practice as mentors while they stay in the classroom is key to this retention.

Finally, I think the loan provisions of the bill are also a priority, so that all preservice educators, regardless of whether they are able to join the residency program, can afford to complete their degrees in education and student teach. Cost of living often keeps preservice teachers from student teaching, instead pursuing other work or deciding to enter the classroom with a conditional license, even though research consistently demonstrates the practicum and student teaching experiences are vital to preservice teacher development. As coordinator UMaine's MAT program, which provides licensure in secondary education, I have had a number of students choose not to finish the program, because they could enter a classroom

with a conditional license. They often struggle, because of the lack of practicum experiences they have had. Similarly, I have had other students delay completing they're degree while they pursue other full-time work, because of the cost of living or need to provide for their families. The loans would provide much needed support for preservice educators. Novice educators enter a classroom more prepared if they have had experiences student teaching during their preservice preparation.

Thank you for considering this bill, and I urge you to support LD 1608.