

TESTIMONY NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST

L.D. 1964

AN ACT TO IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMISSION TO DEVELOP A PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE BENEFITS PROGRAM

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder 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, neither for nor against L.D. 1964.

As school leaders we are committed to supporting our employees and offer pay and benefits that are competitive in the marketplace. Family medical leave, both at the state and federal levels, has historically been an obligation of the employer, not for payment to the individual but to assure the job will still be there upon return from the family medical leave. Most usually, this leave is run concurrently with other sick, vacation, or other paid time off (PTO) leave an employee may have accrued so there is no immediate expense to the employee.

The bill proposes that 1 percent of wages, with half a percent paid by the employer and the other half by the employee, be contributed to support the program it creates. We do view this as an unfunded mandate because it appears neither employer or employee has a choice in the matter.

It further creates an administrative burden to set up payroll deductions and determine who is eligible, and then remit that 1 percent to the state. The proposal also does not seem to recognize that school districts already have generous sick-leave benefits in negotiated contracts.

The Associations recognize the importance of providing safety nets for employees. For employees who have less than robust sick-leave benefits due to length of time on the job or leave that had been previously used, school employers can understand the need for providing this type of paid family medical leave.

There are many unanswered questions on how this proposal would work. Is this at local expense? Is it a cost to the state and not a responsibility to each school administrative unit? We encourage the Committee to better understand the financial impact of this bill before taking a position. Based on our initial reading, L.D. 1964 would be a burden on school districts and ultimately local taxpayers.