

February 27, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Miranda Engstrom, and I am a proud Maine educator with 17 years of experience dedicated to fostering literacy and a love for learning in young students. I am writing today in strong support of LD 360, a bill that will continue to provide Maine's first graders with free books through the Dirigo Reads program.

In my role as a Literacy Specialist at Lamoine Consolidated School, I have witnessed firsthand the profound impact that Dirigo Reads has had on my students and their families. Many children enter my classroom with limited access to books at home, creating an early barrier to literacy development. Dirigo Reads removes this obstacle, ensuring that every first-grade student receives a brand-new book each month, regardless of their family's financial situation.


The excitement and pride on my students' faces as they receive their monthly book is something truly special. They eagerly turn the pages, share stories with their peers, and, most importantly, take these books home to read with their families. These books become cherished possessions, building home libraries that might not have otherwise existed. Parents have shared with me how this program has encouraged more reading at home, strengthened family bonding through shared storytelling, and ignited a newfound love of reading in their children.

Beyond fostering a love for books, Dirigo Reads promotes educational equity by giving all students—regardless of background—an opportunity to experience the joy of literacy. For students who may not have regular access to books outside of school, this program levels the playing field, reinforcing foundational reading skills critical to lifelong success.

In addition to my work with young learners, I also serve as an adult literacy tutor. Through this experience, I have encountered adults in our community who struggle with literacy, some of whom are parents or guardians of the children benefiting from Dirigo Reads. This program not only supports young readers but also empowers these children to support their adults at home. By bringing books into their households, students are fostering a literacy-rich environment, often reading to and with their parents or caregivers, strengthening literacy skills for the entire family.

LD 360 represents a commitment to Maine's youngest learners and to the future of literacy in our state. Ensuring that Dirigo Reads continues to provide books to first-grade students is an investment in education, family engagement, and a stronger, more literate Maine. I urge you to support LD 360 and help preserve this vital program for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Miranda Engstrom
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2023 Hancock County Teacher of the Year