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*Testimony of Representative Sophie Warren in Opposition to*  
**L.D. 396, An Act to Provide for a Later Starting Time for High Schools**  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs*

Good morning, respected colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. I offer testimony to you today in opposition to **L.D. 396, An Act to Provide for a Later Starting Time for High Schools**. The proposed bill requires secondary schools to begin no earlier than 8:30 a.m. starting in the 2026-2027 school year. While I understand and appreciate the intention behind the bill, recognizing the important and scientifically supported need for adequate sleep for high school students, there are significant and wide-reaching implications of this legislation that need to be carefully considered. I believe that the proposed changes could harm students, families, and communities in ways that will disproportionately impact working parents, rural areas, and low-income families.

One of the most immediate consequences of this bill is its' potential to burden working parents. For families where both parents or caregivers are employed, the delayed school start time will create logistical challenges. Many parents rely on a structured daily routine to balance their work schedules with their children's school hours. This shift would require many to make difficult decisions about adjusting their own work hours or finding alternative childcare arrangements, often at additional cost. In a state where the cost of living is already a strain for many, this proposal would create yet another financial burden on already stretched families. We hear regularly about not only the cost of, but the availability of childcare.

For parents of younger children or those unable to adjust their work hours, the delayed start time would likely require additional childcare. In many cases, this would mean that parents must either find and pay for childcare during the extra time before school or potentially pay for after-school care if the school day ends later. For families living paycheck to paycheck or in lower-income communities, these added costs could be financially insurmountable. Further, for low-income communities, access to affordable childcare options may not be readily available, leaving parents in an even more precarious situation. It's important to remember that this bill's intended benefit is at risk of being undermined if parents cannot afford the necessary care, forcing them to choose between their child's sleep and their financial security. Compounding this consequence, we know when the need for childcare cannot be afforded or found by a family, more often than not the labor falls to women to balance the work of childcare with work outside the home. I would ask we consider the many connected consequences of changing the school day in such a way.



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The shortage of school bus drivers is already a significant concern across Maine and the nation. Many districts are struggling to hire and retain enough bus drivers to accommodate current schedules, let alone adjusting to an additional, new, later start time. The logistical strain of shifting school hours would put even more pressure on an already overwhelmed transportation system. School districts, particularly in rural areas, may not have the resources to accommodate the necessary changes to bus routes or extend driver hours. Additionally, this proposal may have further implications on existing teacher and staff shortages as schools may find this change impacting the working day and schedules of our essential education workforce, increasing scheduling difficulties and logistical problems.

The impact of this legislation will be felt most acutely in rural and low-income areas. Within a wealthier district, it may still be lower income or one parent families that are acutely impacted. Broadly speaking, rural districts already struggle with limited resources, both in terms of staff and funding. They often do not have the infrastructure or capacity to implement significant changes without diverting funds from other essential programs. Moreover, rural communities may face additional transportation challenges, such as longer bus routes, limited public transportation, and greater distances between schools and students' homes. For these districts, this bill could create a divide between wealthier, urban areas that can more easily adjust and rural areas that are forced to absorb the costs and challenges. The logistical implications of a statewide change in the start time should not be underestimated, particularly for those living in areas with less infrastructure and fewer transportation options.

It is important to remember that every policy change, especially one with such wide-reaching consequences, requires careful consideration of its long-term effects. While the potential benefit of later school start times for teenagers' health is worth exploring, the cost to families, especially those already struggling financially or geographically isolated, must be weighed as well.

In conclusion, I urge you to carefully consider the broader impact of this legislation on all Maine families, especially those in working-class and rural communities. The consequences of such a change are not just logistical, but financial, and the strain on already under-resourced schools and communities could exacerbate existing inequities. Rather than pushing forward with a blanket mandate, I encourage the committee to explore alternative solutions that balance students' health with the realities of families and schools in all areas of Maine.

Thank you for your time and consideration.