



Maine Education Association

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Testimony

In Opposition to

LD 543: An Act to Enhance Maine's Wildlife Conservation Efforts and Preserve Maine's Sporting Heritage by Requiring Hunter Safety Education in Schools

Jan Kosinski, Government Relations Director, Maine Education Association

Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

March 3, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and other esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Jan Kosinski, and I am the Director of Government Relations for the Maine Education Association (MEA). The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators, including teachers and other educators in nearly every public school in the state, as well as full-time faculty and other professional and support staff in both the University of Maine and Community College systems. Thousands of retired educators continue their connection and advocacy work through the MEA- Retired program.

I offer this testimony today on behalf of the MEA in **OPPOSITION** to LD 543, *An Act to Enhance Maine's Wildlife Conservation Efforts and Preserve Maine's Sporting Heritage by Requiring Hunter Safety Education in Schools*.

As you have already heard so far this session, teachers, educators, and public schools are doing the best they can despite the many challenges they are facing – workforce shortages, mental health needs of students, and property tax sensitivity are chief concerns. While the MEA respects and appreciates hunting and we completely understand the need for students to be aware of basic gun safety protocols to keep students and others in our communities safe, we are deeply concerned about the mandate contained in this bill.

This bill requires a firearm hunter safety course “no later than grade 9.” This session the Committee will hold hearings on bills on a whole host of new curriculum mandates on schools. Given the challenges our schools and educators are facing, we are deeply concerned about any new mandates on public schools.

In addition, the bill before you goes farther and requires a hunter safety course as a graduation requirement for all secondary schools. That is a bridge too far. Today, the Committee will hold a public hearing on a bill to increase the math requirements for students to graduate. Other bills include requirements for schools to expand personal finance instruction. While we may have concerns about these bills, they seem far more in-line with the needs of students than an additional hunter safety course.

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It is important to note that Maine's current graduation requirements found in Title 20-A, Sec 4722 require students to complete 4 years of English, 2 years of social studies, math, and science and one year of fine arts (i.e., art, music, forensics, or drama). The current standards do not include computer science, foreign language, health or physical education or many other important subjects and we would urge the Committee to review and consider the current graduation requirements before adding another.

The issue of guns has grown controversial in recent years, due in large part to the gun violence epidemic in our country. This bill attempts to impose firearm safety onto all students, even those students who may hold strong feelings about firearms. I would hope foreign languages are not controversial subjects. The same with computer science and health and physical education. Obviously, if a mandate such as one called for in LD 543 were ever enacted, we can expect vociferous reactions in some communities. Instead, we hope parents will talk to their children about firearms and safe hunting practices. In fact, many schools already operate gun safety awareness programs in schools. Young students are taught what to do when they find a gun unattended. We hope parents who hunt and keep guns in their home will take the time with their children, like generations before, and teach their children about gun safety and safe hunting practices.

Thank you for your time and your service to the people of Maine. I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.