

Testimony of Dr. Amy Johnson, Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI)

In support of L.D. 696, An Act to Bolster the Maine Teacher Residency Program

Date: March 10, 2025

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

I regret that I am unable to attend in person today to speak in favor of LD 696.

In addition to my primary role conducting education policy research on behalf of the legislature and Department of Education, I also have a smaller role helping with the program evaluation of the Maine Teacher Residency (MTR) project. I have been collecting data, including program completion, hiring, and retention rates as well as survey data, since the project's inception.

As others will testify, the MTR has produced strong results in its short time. The completion rates are comparable to traditional programs, despite the increased intensity of the experience. In its first two cohorts, four out of five residents who participated in the program as pre-service teachers were hired into teaching positions upon graduation, a rate that far outpaces the job placement rates of traditional pathways.* And for those 20 residents who were already emergency or conditionally certified teachers, a whopping 95% were retained in the teacher workforce the next year – a stark contrast to the high turnover rates among first-year teachers both nationally and in Maine.

However, the numbers do not fully capture what is arguably the most important aspect: MTR is not a single stand-alone teacher preparation program. It is working at the intersection of multiple traditional and alternative pathways to figure out how to borrow the best aspects of each approach to support developing teachers. It is reshaping traditional programs to help them accommodate working students, while also supporting schools to develop the mentoring capacity and job flexibility that is needed to nurture the aspiring teachers they employ.

In these days of staff shortages, we can no longer expect that schools will be able to hire educators who are ready for all aspects of the job on day one. And when they fill positions with individuals who are still working toward certification, the quickest path to fulfilling course requirements is the piecemeal approach via transcript analysis. When developing educators opt for this approach they miss out on the advising, coaching, and feedback systems that higher education institutions provide for their enrolled students. These needs then fall to the employing school, shifting the obligations but not the capacity nor the resources to provide more the more intensive mentoring that is needed. The MTR project is working to change this by building

*Based on national rates. Maine based job placement data are not systematically collected.

options in the middle. It is helping both educator preparation programs and the schools that employ beginning educators to expand their capacity to support individuals who are working. This means more options for aspiring teachers to fill much-needed positions and serve Maine students while developing the knowledge and skills they need for a successful career. Importantly, it is also building even stronger relationships between preparation programs and schools as they share the load of supporting beginning teachers.

At this time in its development, the infrastructure being built by the MTR and its partner schools is emerging and tentative. Project leaders are still honing the best policies and strategies for supporting working students, and many of the learnings have not yet been codified. With the imminent loss of federal funding, the MTR is in danger of losing the progress that has been made. Additional state support at this stage is crucial to solidify what has been built as well as to foster continued refinement of effective practices for both preparation programs and the schools who employ developing educators.

I can available to provide further data and context at the work session if helpful.

Sincerely,

Amy Johnson

Co-Director, MEPRI