

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 369

AN ACT TO GRANT OR EXTEND CONDITIONAL TEACHING CERTIFICATES UNDER CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES

March 11, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Eileen King, the deputy executive director for Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and the Maine School Superintendents Association in opposition to L.D. 369, An Act to Grant or Extend Conditional Teaching Certificates Under Certain Circumstances.

Our associations support the broad goal of this bill – to get more qualified educators into the classroom in front of our children. Every district is struggling to hire staff, and we must do everything possible to make it easier to bring in and retain excellent educators.

We are in broad support of the second section of this bill, which would allow the commissioner to extend a particular individual's conditional certificate due to a specific circumstance, such as an illness or public health emergency.

This would be very helpful for Maine school districts. These sorts of situations are stressful for educators – both at work and at home – and this mechanism would allow for a temporary extension of a conditional certificate, providing them with a limited period of time to obtain their certification requirements. This policy would also still require oversight from medical professionals and local school officials, ensuring that the exception will only be used in very specific circumstances. Our members believe this would allow for a case-by-case approach that will make the certification process easier for educators and local schools

Our associations have more concerns over the remaining parts of this bill.

Part D would allow anyone who has worked as a full-time professor for at least 5 years in Maine to receive a conditional teaching certificate. We believe it is worthwhile to look for new teachers in the college ranks, and we have seen many examples of professors who have become excellent K-12 teachers.

However, substantial work around changing Maine's certification rules is already occurring at the State Board of Education. We believe this is the appropriate place for these changes to occur, as Board members can listen to stakeholders and balance the many interconnected pieces of Maine's certification rules to develop solutions to improve our education workforce. Any large-scale changes should be occurring there, and we would encourage the proponents of L.D. 369 to work with the State Board on these changes.

We are also concerned over the section of this bill that would exclude these full-time college professors from fingerprinting fees to obtain their certification. We support the idea of reducing fees for teaching candidates – but we believe legislators should explore ways to reduce fees for all candidates, not just one subsection. Districts have seen over and over again that these fees have been a major barrier towards certification – particularly for ed techs who want to move into teaching but lack the resources to pay these expenses. International and out-of-state candidates face many additional fees associated with certification, such as the cost to have their transcripts reviewed by the DOE. Our associations feel it would be beneficial to review all of these fees associated with the certification process and analyze the best ways to minimize costs and barriers. But we are not in favor of exempting just one specific subgroup, as proposed in this bill.

Again, our associations appreciate the goals of this measure and believe that, with changes, we could support many of the aspects included here. But, as proposed, we oppose L.D. 369. We would be happy to work together with this committee to further discuss our concerns and find areas of agreement moving forward.

Thank you for your consideration.