



Maine Education Association

Jesse Hargrove President | Beth French Vice President | Jaye Rich Treasurer
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

Testimony

In Support Of

LD 696: An Act to Bolster the Maine Teacher Residency Program

Jan Kosinski, Government Relations Director, Maine Education Association

Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

March 11th, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and other 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 support of LD 696, *An Act to Bolster the Maine Teacher Residency Program*.

We have already testified about the critical workforce shortages we are facing in public schools for teachers, and we believe lifting the minimum teacher salary is the most important way to address these challenges, as called for in LD 34, *An Act to Increase the Minimum Salary for Teachers*. As I shared with the Committee in testimony for that bill, we are seeing nearly 1,400 teachers per year retiring or quitting the profession, yet only four hundred students are graduating each year from an undergraduate educator preparation program. This is leaving school districts to hire teachers using emergency or conditional certificates. We have concerns that teachers with these certificates will need additional mentorship (as called for in LD 470, *An Act to Require School Administrative Units to Adopt Mentoring Programs for Teachers and to Improve Existing Programs*) because these educators may not be prepared for all the challenges they will face in a classroom setting.

LD 696 is another key component to addressing the shortages we are seeing, and we support it. The Maine Teacher Residency project at the University of Southern Maine is an innovative project, currently funded by a grant from the US Department of Education and includes a \$3,500 tuition waiver and hands on experience to help teachers and ed techs, working in our schools now. This program combines academic work for aspiring teachers along with hands-on experience and mentoring to best prepare individuals for classroom roles.

Last session, the Committee supported a similar bill, LD 1608, *An Act to Address Teacher Shortages Through Financial Assistance and Career Advancement Opportunities*. The intent of the original bill was to provide this program with \$1,000,000 per year of ongoing funding to make sure we can maintain and even grow the program. The bill was sent to the Special Appropriations Table. LD 1608 was finally passed by the Legislature and signed into law by the Governor but instead of the \$1,000,000 in ongoing funding, the bill was amended to only provide a more modest appropriation of \$200,000 and this funding was one time only. This funding is certainly helpful, but the federal grant was especially helpful to maintaining the program. With the current tenor of budget cutting happening in Congress, we are worried about the sustainability of this important program. We hope the

35 Community Drive, Augusta, ME 04330 | 1349 Broadway, Bangor, ME 04401
PO Box 310, Caribou, ME 04736 | 29 Christopher Toppi Drive, South Portland ME 04106

207-622-5866 | 207-888-2070 fax | www.mainea.org



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Committee will vote “ought to pass” and work with the supporters to make sure we can find the resources to maintain and even grow this important program. We feel this program is one piece of a challenging puzzle and could help provide classroom ready teachers upon completion.

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

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