



Testimony in Support of LD 220:

“An Act to Establish the Hope and Inclusion Scholarship Program in Order to Provide Funding for Students Attending Certain Private Schools and Students Receiving Home Instruction”

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Harris Van Pate and I serve as policy analyst for Maine Policy Institute. Maine Policy is a free market think tank, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that advocates for individual liberty and economic freedom in Maine. I submit this testimony on behalf of the Maine Policy Institute in strong support of LD 220, "An Act to Establish the Hope and Inclusion Scholarship Program."

This legislation represents a crucial step toward expanding educational opportunities for Maine students by allowing public education funds to follow the child to their best-fit learning environment, whether in a public, private, or home-based educational setting.

For too long, Maine's education system has been constrained by a one-size-fits-all approach that limits parental choice and student success. The Hope and Inclusion Scholarship Program seeks to correct this by providing scholarships—funded by the per-pupil allocation that a student’s assigned public school would have received—to families who choose to enroll in private schools or provide home instruction. This model recognizes that parents, not government bureaucracies, are best suited to determine their children’s educational needs.

Educational Freedom and Parental Choice

LD 220 aligns with a growing national movement toward educational choice, which empowers families to select learning environments that best suit their children's unique needs and aspirations.¹ Studies from states with similar programs show that student outcomes improve when parents can choose their children’s educational setting.² Students in school choice programs have demonstrated higher academic achievement, better student safety, and increased parental satisfaction compared to those limited to their local public schools.

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<https://schoolchoiceawareness.org/january-2025-survey/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CParent%20demand%20for%20K%E2%80%9312,choice%20is%20here%20to%20stay.>

²

<https://thefga.org/research/expanded-school-choice-generate-positive-outcomes/#:~:text=Studies%20have%20shown%20that%20expanded,parental%20satisfaction%2C%20and%20student%20safety.&text=States%20should%20expand%20school%20choice,the%20needs%20of%20their%20children.>



Moreover, parental choice fosters competition and innovation within the education system. Schools are incentivized to improve their offerings, curriculum, and student services by allowing funds to follow students. A more competitive education marketplace ensures that public and private schools focus on quality, efficiency, and responsiveness to student needs.

Addressing Inequities and Expanding Opportunities

The Hope and Inclusion Scholarship Program is particularly vital for students from lower-income families and rural communities who often have fewer quality school options. Wealthy families already exercise school choice by relocating to districts with better schools or paying for private education out of pocket. LD 220 would extend similar opportunities to all families, ensuring that financial constraints do not prevent children from receiving the best possible education.

Maine's existing town tuitioning program has long demonstrated the benefits of school choice.³ LD 220 builds upon this tradition by expanding eligibility and ensuring that more students benefit from high-quality education that aligns with their needs.

Fiscal Responsibility and Public Benefit

Critics argue that programs like LD 220 will undermine public schools by redirecting funds. However, this claim ignores the reality that public education funding is intended to support students, not school systems. Additionally, school choice programs are cost-effective. In states with similar scholarship programs, taxpayers often see savings due to lower per-pupil costs compared to public schools in private and home-school settings.⁴

Furthermore, public schools benefit when competition drives improvements in educational quality. Evidence suggests that when students have more options, public schools respond by innovating, adopting new teaching strategies, and improving overall performance.⁵ Rather than harming public education, LD 220 will serve as a catalyst for its enhancement.

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<https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/The-Effects-of-Town-Tuitioning-in-Vermont-and-Maine.pdf>

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[https://www.edchoice.org/engage/the-fiscal-effects-of-school-choice/#:~:text=On%20a%20per%2Dstudent%20basis,to%20\\$7%2C800%20per%20program%20participant.](https://www.edchoice.org/engage/the-fiscal-effects-of-school-choice/#:~:text=On%20a%20per%2Dstudent%20basis,to%20$7%2C800%20per%20program%20participant.)

⁵ <https://www.education.nh.gov/news/education-choice-will-save-public-schools>



Constitutional and Legal Precedent

LD 220 is consistent with recent legal rulings affirming the right of parents to direct their children's education. In *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue* (2020) and *Carson v. Makin* (2022), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states cannot discriminate against certain types of private schools in school choice programs based on religion or speech. By providing scholarships to students regardless of the kind of school they attend, LD 220 ensures compliance with these constitutional principles and protects educational freedom for all Maine families.

Conclusion

LD 220 represents a transformative opportunity for Maine's education system. It places students first, empowers families, and strengthens educational institutions by fostering innovation and competition. Maine families deserve the right to choose the best academic path for their children, and this legislation ensures that they will have access to the resources necessary to make those choices.

For these reasons, we urge this committee to support LD 220 this session. Thank you for your time and consideration.