



Testimony in Support of LD 282:

“An Act to Raise the Limit on the Total Number of Public Charter Schools”

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. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 282 "An Act to Raise the Limit on the Total Number of Public Charter Schools."

Maine’s current arbitrary cap of 10 charter schools restricts educational opportunities for students and limits the state’s ability to foster innovation in education. Raising or eliminating this cap would expand parental choice, increase competition among schools, and drive improvements in educational outcomes—particularly for students in underserved communities.

The Success of Charter Schools in Maine

Since their introduction, Maine’s public charter schools have demonstrated their ability to improve student outcomes by offering specialized curricula, innovative teaching methods, and greater flexibility to meet students’ individual needs. According to assessments, Maine’s charter schools are serving a diverse student body, including a significant proportion of students who are economically disadvantaged,¹ and those with educational disabilities.² They consistently produce strong academic results despite operating with fewer resources than traditional public schools and adapt to changes in learning demands, such as the pandemic, far more effectively.³

Furthermore, demand for charter school enrollment remains high, with waitlists growing each year.⁴ The limited number of available slots forces families into a system that may not be the best fit for their children, denying them the opportunity for an education that meets their unique needs. Furthermore, these caps on enrollment and the total number of charters allowed to operate in our state directly force families that disproportionately have low-income or children with educational disabilities to remain at schools they would otherwise not attend.

¹ https://www.centerforlearnerequity.org/wp-content/uploads/CLE-crdc2024_brief1_enrollment.pdf

² <https://www.pressherald.com/2015/12/13/special-education-students-drawn-to-maine-charter-schools/>

³ <https://mainepolicy.org/the-case-for-charter-school-reform/>

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<https://themainemonitor.org/maines-two-virtual-charter-schools-see-increased-enrollment-longer-wait-lists-during-pandemic/#:~:text=Maine%20Virtual%20Academy's%20waiting%20list%2C%20which%20was,students%20last%20year%2C%20now%20has%20approximately%20350.>



The Benefits of Expanding Charter Schools

1. **Increased Parental Choice** – Parents should have the right to choose the educational environment that best suits their child’s needs, whether that is a traditional public school, a public charter school, or another alternative.
2. **Enhanced Competition and Innovation** – Charter schools encourage competition within the public school system, pushing all schools to improve performance and adapt to changing student needs.
3. **Improved Educational Outcomes** – Studies from across the country have shown that charter schools, particularly in urban and low-income areas, lead to better academic performance, increased graduation rates, and higher college acceptance rates.
4. **Greater Flexibility** – Charter schools are free from some of the bureaucratic constraints that hinder traditional public schools, allowing them to tailor education to students and innovate in ways that improve engagement and achievement.

Addressing Misconceptions About Charter Schools

Some opponents argue that charter schools divert funds from traditional public schools. However, charter schools are public schools funded through the same mechanisms as district schools, often with much fewer resources. They also operate under stricter accountability measures, ensuring that funding is directly tied to student success. Moreover, expanding charter schools does not force any student to leave their district school; rather, it offers an additional option for families who seek alternatives.

Conclusion

By passing LD 282, Maine can ensure that its education system remains dynamic, competitive, and responsive to the needs of students and families. The demand for high-quality, flexible education options is evident, and policymakers should remove arbitrary barriers that prevent students from accessing the best possible learning environments.

We urge the committee to support LD 282 and give Maine families more educational freedom and opportunity. Thank you for your time and consideration.