

## TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 808

### AN ACT TO REQUIRE SCHOOL BOARDS AND GOVERNING BODIES OF APPROVED PRIVATE SCHOOLS TO IMPLEMENT WEARABLE PANIC ALERT SYSTEMS

March 13, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs committee, I am Robbie Feinberg, the director of communications and government relations for the Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association in opposition to L.D. 808, An Act to Require School Boards and Governing Bodies of Approved Private Schools to Implement Wearable Panic Alert Systems.

As our associations shared in our testimony on L.D. 168, ensuring the safety of students and staff is a top priority for superintendents and board members. Every school district carefully works with law enforcement regularly to ensure their emergency response plans are strong. Schools have added cameras, improved technology at doors and entryways, and hired school resource officers to make sure staff and students feel safe when they enter their classroom each day.

In fact, some Maine districts have already implemented these wearable panic alert systems as part of their approach to ensuring school safety. While we appreciate the bill sponsor's intent to further protect schools and students throughout Maine, our associations are deeply concerned about the added costs of such a system and its effect on school budgets.

Some estimates place the cost of these systems at tens of thousands of dollars per year. We know examples of Maine school boards who have considered these systems but deemed them simply too expensive. At a time when some school districts are already facing cuts to staff or programming, we do not want to see state requirements put additional pressure on local budgets.

Local taxpayers are strapped, and any new mandates from the legislature must be accompanied by state funding to make this possible. Other states have taken such an approach. Florida is providing more than \$6 million per year to help schools implement these panic alert systems. Utah provided more than \$100 million for a range of school safety initiatives, including one similar to what is described in this bill. In New York, which did not provide additional funding, schools are only encouraged to consider these measures, but final decisions are ultimately left up to local districts. We believe these types of approaches are much more appropriate and would properly consider the needs and financial constraints of Maine schools.

Again, our associations are in full support of any measures to improve the safety of our students, but believe the state should not impose more unfunded mandates that will raise the cost on local taxpayers.

Thank you for your consideration.