

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

L.D. 817

### AN ACT TO REMOVE RESTRICTIONS THAT PROHIBIT SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS FROM MAKING PURCHASES THROUGH COOPERATIVES

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 Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and the Maine School Superintendents Association in support of L.D. 817, *An Act to Remove Restrictions That Prohibit School Administrative Units from Making Purchases Through Cooperatives*.

You will likely hear (or have already heard) from local school board members about the need for this bill, and the reason is straightforward: they believe that this will save our schools and local taxpayers money.

Across the country, many schools and municipalities purchase supplies and equipment through cooperative purchases. In these situations, a large national organization, such as Sourcewell or Omnia, conducts a national Request for Proposal process on behalf of one or more government units on services ranging from facility maintenance to artificial turf fields or playgrounds. This is the same type of competitive bidding process that local schools must perform on their own. Instead of soliciting bids themselves, a municipality or school can instead search through these pre-qualified projects to find quotes and awards that have already gone through the competitive bidding process. This not only saves time, but it routinely saves money. Schools can take advantage of the economies of scale used in this nationwide process, which routinely lead to lower priced quotes than what a school would have received if they had put out an RFP on their own.

Unfortunately, Maine statute prohibits this process for many aspects of school construction when the cost would exceed \$250,000. The law requires that contracts for these projects “must be awarded by competitive bid”. And while cooperative purchasing requires national competitive bids, schools have been given guidance that such purchases are still not allowed. This has been frustrating for some districts, who are required to put these projects out to bid but have found that they would have saved thousands of dollars if they had been able to take advantage of cooperative purchasing instead.

L.D. 817 is narrowly tailored to allow for exceptions to this law and would specifically allow for cooperative purchasing to be used for athletic fields or other limited uses. This would provide school districts with more options as they look to improve their school campuses, and we expect that it would save them money. We also believe that the procurement standards and competitive bidding used in this process is an equal – and in some cases, superior – process to soliciting bids locally. Our associations urge you to support L.D. 817.