

## Testimony of Susan Lieberman

### **LD 628** An Act Regarding Eligibility to Apply for a Department of Education Diploma

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Susan Lieberman, and I am the co-chair of the State Advisory Committee on Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education (TDAE).

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony. I am in favor of LD 628, to continue the Department of Education Diploma Program for fourth year students who are unable to satisfy the requirements for a district diploma because of significant interruption to the student's education program. This issue was brought to the TDAE committee and after doing research on the topic, we unanimously voted to bring this issue to the legislature.

We need to provide alternative pathways to graduation for students who have experienced educational disruptions. Presently, there are no provisions for students who experience moves once or twice during the school year due to economic instability or due to a traumatic event. Many of these students don't have the resources to support their sudden transition and may lose the ability to graduate on time because their new school has additional requirements that were not expected in their previous school. In addition, the older statute doesn't cover students who have been in a psychiatric hospital for fewer than 10 days yet still need to be in-home or at an alternative placement. Coverage for hospital stays is often shortened even when the student has high needs.

Over 300 students received the Maine Department of Education diploma in school year 2023-24. By pursuing the ME DOE Diploma, these students successfully completed the core requirements for their high school education as dictated by the Maine statute. They weren't given a free ticket; these students proved they had the state credits required for all Maine high school students.

We are concerned that too many students may drop out of school because they lack sufficient credits to meet specific local requirements. Many of these students have experienced educational disruption due to trauma, related to physical or mental health, economic insecurity, and/or high mobility.

For these reasons, we strongly encourage you to pass this act to continue the Department of Education Diploma Program to include students who experienced significant interruption to their educational program.

I am happy to further discuss my position or answer any questions.

Thank you for your time today.

*Susan Lieberman*