

Good Afternoon distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Jesse Bartke of Tenants Harbor, ME and I am the Principal of Oceanside High School in Rockland ME. We are part of RSU 13.

My district is in favor of LD 628.

With the Interruption Diploma set to sunset on September 1, 2026 ([L.D. 873](#)), a significant at-risk population will be left without a viable pathway to earn a high school diploma before aging out of the education system. By continuing the expanded eligibility criteria for the Disruption Diploma ([MRS 20-A Chapter 211, Subchapter 5](#)) it will help reduce high school dropout rates in Maine and increase opportunities for students to achieve a high school diploma. While some schools use local control to establish alternative diploma criteria, a statewide expansion of the Disruption Diploma will create consistent standards across all schools in Maine.

Students who struggle to earn credits often face numerous challenges that hinder academic success, such as family dysfunction, substance abuse, or mental health issues.

Schools frequently focus on providing foundational support to help these students succeed academically, but these supports may not immediately translate into credit accumulation, especially early in their high school career. Our observations show that it often takes approximately two years for an at risk youth to earn credits at a rate that aligns with graduation requirements. By this time, they are frequently too far behind to graduate on schedule, leading to discouragement and school dropout.

By offering an alternative pathway to earn a diploma, these students would have the support they need to graduate alongside their peers. Additionally, earning a high school diploma has been shown to reduce the likelihood of involvement in the justice system and increase their opportunities to be a productive member of their community.

For these reasons I strongly urge the Committee to vote unanimously ought to pass.