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Alternative Education Association of Maine  
LD 628

My name is Lenny Holmes, I am the Director of Alternative Education for Bonny Eagle. I am also the President of the Alternative Education Association of Maine. I have served the past 4 years on the Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education committee. Finally I have been a Maine Educator for 30 years. I want to offer to you why I so strongly believe there is a need to expand the eligibility of Maine students who may apply for the Maine Department of Education Diploma.

Currently there are 4 established "Educational Disruptions" that are in the Law, outside of the Covid Exemption which expires in July of 2026, which I believe are too limiting in their scope to address the inequities some Maine students face when compared to their peers. The 4 Disruptions are, 1) attendance at 3 different High Schools, 2) Admittance into a facility for treatment for more than 2 weeks, 3) Experience Homelessness or Foster Care 4) student is considered a Migrant student. These defined Disruptions are not broad enough based on what we know about factors that create inequalities for students. I would argue that some of the examples I am going to share with you are far more impactful than the current defined disruptions.

For example Research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's) is overwhelming in regards to the negative impact on children who have 3 or more ACE's have on their success in education (and life). Children who have experienced such things as poverty, abuse, whether that be physical, sexual or emotional, neglect or substance abuse by a parent all have been proven to create life circumstances which create barriers that the majority of their peers never have to go through.

There are other obvious life circumstances such as losing a parent or sibling or being asked to be the caregiver at home that also have a huge impact on a student's educational path. For those of us who are in education we could easily provide you with a number of specific student experiences that we know impeded and put at a disadvantage students who we have worked with especially when compared to their classmates.

It is inarguable that all students are not dealt the same hand and that some have had to shoulder an even greater burden. Making the Maine DOE Diploma available to these students shows a recognition for the struggles they have had to endure and certainly seems to fulfill the intent of the law. It is not ok to knowingly ignore those inequities. I implore you to endorse this bill and move it along through the process as it is simply the right thing to do.