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COMMISSIONER

March 18, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Senate Chair
Representative Murphy, House Chair
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Distinguished Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

LD 628, An Act Regarding Eligibility to Apply for a Department of Education Diploma, proposes to allow a fourth-year high school student to apply for a Department of Education diploma if they are unable to satisfy the diploma requirements of their school due to a disruption to their educational during their secondary school experience. In order to obtain a Department of Education diploma, the Commissioner of Education must approve.

Currently, Title 20-A, §257-A describes the Department of Education diploma, which allows for the awarding of a diploma if a student has experienced a disruption to their education and is unable to meet the requirements for a diploma from the local school administrative unit.

Title 20-A, §5161 currently allows for disruptions due to:

- A. Homelessness or foster care placement;
- B. Absence for 10 or more consecutive school days due to placement in an interim program;
- C. Enrollment in 3 or more schools or educational programs in a single school year; or
- D. The student being an immigrant student or a migrant student.

This bill would expand eligibility for a student who experiences disruption, making it easier for them to demonstrate or document their disruptive experience. In order to be eligible for a Department of Education Diploma, a student would be required to be in at least their fourth year of secondary school. This requirement may encourage students to complete their fourth or fifth years of school instead of dropping out, as students will see a realistic path to earning a diploma. The bill also amends current statute to allow for a housing disruption due to circumstances other than homelessness or foster care, which reflects many students' experiences that lead to educational disruption. This bill expands the definition of educational disruption to include those students chronically absent due to unforeseen circumstances, including a serious medical condition. This flexibility ensures that students managing educational disruptions due to interim placements, hospitalizations, and serious medical

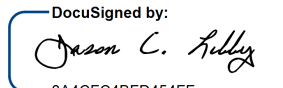
conditions are able to avail themselves of the high school diploma. Students with this level of absenteeism may not have 10 consecutive days of absence from school but may have many more nonconsecutive days over the course of a school year as a result of an unforeseen circumstance.

Finally, LD 628 proposes to reduce the number of different schools a student must enroll in before they are considered to have experienced disruption. The Maine DOE believes that 2 different schools during secondary school qualifies as a disruption.

The proposed amendment builds on existing statute defining educational disruption to reflect those experiences of educational disruption that principals, school counselors, educators, students and parents have identified as barriers to meeting all of the requirements from a school administrative unit. As with the existing Department of Education diploma, school staff will be able to work with students and parents on a case-by-case basis to put into place a plan that allows a student to complete their high school experience and earn a diploma.

The Department will be available to provide additional information on LD 628, [An Act Regarding Eligibility to Apply for a Department of Education Diploma](#) and respond to any questions during the upcoming work session.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

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Jason C. Libby, Ph. D.

Education Pathways and Early College Coordinator

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