

Joseph Hufnagel
DOE's Advisory Committee on Truancy, Dropout, and Alternative Education
(Augusta) & The Landing Place/Homeworthy (Rockland)
LD 322

Good morning, and thank you again for providing this opportunity for me to speak with you all this morning. It's nice to see you all again. I also want to thank Representative Brennan for sponsoring this bill.

My name is Joseph Hufnagel. I am the Vice Chair of the State Advisory Committee on Truancy, Dropout, and Alternative Education as well as the Director of The Landing Place & Youth Services for Homeworthy, which is located in Rockland.

This morning I am here to speak in support of LD 322 - An Act to Promote Student Attendance in Schools by Requiring the Commissioner of Education to Implement School Attendance Best Practices.

For starters, when thinking about this bill it is important to understand that - different from chronic absenteeism - the term truancy only covers unexcused absences, and, in past years, sending truancy cases to court or DHHS has not been effective. More to the point, last school year, 23.5% of Maine students (K-12) were considered to be chronically absent, which includes unexcused and excused absences.

If we, as a state, are truly serious about doing what makes sense to effectively address and respond to the root causes of chronic absenteeism then supporting this proposed bill would clearly be a step in that direction. Our schools need greater guidance, professional development, and coaching support from ME DOE rather than punitive measures that are ineffective and uninspiring. This newer statute on chronic absenteeism includes preventative and early intervention steps, and it provides further support for schools to develop enduring and supportive relationships with students and families.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration. I truly appreciate all of your hard work and dedication on behalf of youth and families in Maine

Respectfully,

Joseph Hufnagel
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