

Patti Forster, Knox County Resident, Washington, Maine, and Public School Teacher

March 24, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

I have dedicated the past thirty-two years as a public school teacher with the past twelve teaching English at Camden Hills Regional High School. I also serve as the president of the Maine Council for English Language Arts and am a National Board Certified Teacher. Throughout my career, I have been honored to receive several distinctions, including the 2020 Claudette & John Brassil Distinguished Educator Award, the 2021 Knox County Teacher of the Year, and recognition as a semifinalist for the 2022 Maine State Teacher of the Year. Throughout my career, I strive to develop and continually revise a curriculum that engages students in learning reading, writing, and communication skills. I am here to express my strong opposition to LD 660: An Act to Provide Transparency and Public Access to Public School Curricula.

While transparency in education is a value we all share, LD 660 presents significant concerns regarding its potential impact on teachers, students, and the quality of instruction in Maine's public schools. As written, this bill places an unnecessary and burdensome administrative demand on educators, diverting their time and resources away from lesson planning, student engagement, and meaningful instruction. The transparency measures already in place—through curriculum guides, school board meetings, and parent-teacher conferences—ensure that families have access to curriculum materials without compromising the flexibility and professional autonomy of educators.

LD 660 opens the door to undue external scrutiny that can lead to censorship and politicization of classroom content. As an English teacher, I know firsthand the importance of selecting literature and instructional materials that foster critical thinking, empathy, and civic engagement. This bill risks creating an environment where fear of controversy limits the rich perspectives necessary for a well-rounded education. Teachers must be trusted as professionals to deliver content that meets rigorous state standards and serves the best interests of their students.

Additionally, the requirement to post a continuously changing curriculum places an overwhelming burden on educators who consistently adapt their instruction to incorporate current research on learning and the brain, as well as evidence-based teaching practices. Effective teaching is dynamic, responding to new insights and best practices in real time to meet students' evolving needs. Mandating the continuous public disclosure of these updates is not only impractical but also risks oversimplifying the complex, research-driven decision-making process that educators engage in daily.

Public education thrives on collaboration between educators, students, and families. However, imposing rigid and bureaucratic mandates on curriculum transparency does not enhance this collaboration—it undermines it. Instead of fostering trust, LD 660 promotes a climate of suspicion that may drive talented educators away from Maine classrooms, exacerbating the teacher shortage at a time when we should be doing everything possible to support and retain them.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge this committee to vote ought not to pass on LD 660. Maine's educators are committed to transparency, but we need policies that support, not hinder, our ability to provide high-quality education. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

  
Patti Forster