



TESTIMONY OF ALICIA REA, ESQ.
LD 927 – Ought Not to Pass

An Act to Require Chaplains in School Administrative Units

Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
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Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, greetings. My name is Alicia Rea, and I am a policy fellow at the ACLU of Maine, a statewide organization committed to advancing and preserving civil liberties guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions. On behalf of our members, I urge you to oppose LD 927.

This legislation would allow chaplains to take on sensitive and critical responsibilities, such as counseling students, without the same qualifications as school counselors or other student support staff. The ACLU vigorously opposes these efforts. Allowing chaplains in public schools violates students' and families' right to religious freedom. Because chaplains are typically not trained or certified to provide educational or counseling services to youth, students are likely to receive inadequate mental health support that, in some cases, may be harmful.

Allowing public schools to establish paid or voluntary positions for chaplains will inevitably lead to evangelizing and religious coercion of students. This violates the First Amendment's Establishment Clause, which, along with the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment, safeguards the constitutional right to religious liberty.¹ Courts have repeatedly ruled that it is unconstitutional for public schools to invite religious leaders to engage in religious activities with students or to promote religious doctrine to them.²

This bill undermines the fundamental promise of our public education system: public schools must serve all students equally.

Please vote that LD 927 ought not to pass.

¹ U.S. Const. Amend. I.

² See *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421, 424 (1962); *Sch. Dist. of Abington Twp., Pa. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203, 222 (1963); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 84 (1985); *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577, 599 (1992).