

## TESTIMONY NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST

L.D. 973

### AN ACT TO ESTABLISH THE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS WITH PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS GRANT PROGRAM

March 26, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am Eileen King, the deputy executive director for Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association neither for nor against L.D. 973.

L.D. 973 seeks to establish a grant program within the Department of Education to foster partnerships between public schools and community organizations, including colleges, universities, and community action agencies. The bill identifies mental health, public health, and staff development as key focus areas, with a one-time appropriation of \$500,000 for the 2025-26 fiscal year.

The goals outlined in the bill align with the need to strengthen support systems for students, educators, and communities. Collaboration between schools and external partners has the potential to enhance access to valuable services. However, several considerations may be worth further discussion.

1. The bill proposes a one-time allocation of \$500,000. If the program proves successful, what mechanisms will be in place to continue funding beyond the initial investment?
2. How will the grant program ensure that resources are distributed equitably across school districts, particularly those in rural or under-resourced areas?
3. What metrics will be used to assess the effectiveness of the funded initiatives, and how will accountability be maintained for grant recipients?
4. Many school systems already engage in partnerships with community organizations. How will this program complement and enhance existing efforts rather than duplicate them?
5. L.D. 973 also appears to be a complement to the state's ongoing efforts to promote community schools. Are these schools expected to be included in this new grant program? Would new schools fall under the definition of a "community school"?

If successfully implemented, this program could strengthen partnerships between schools and community organizations and improve student access to mental and public health services, offer professional development opportunities for educators, and create a more responsive, community-centered approach to education.

These outcomes could lead to increased student well-being, greater educator support and retention, and stronger connections between schools and the communities they serve.