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RSU 34
LD 218

Testimony in Opposition to LD 218 and LD 607

Presented to the Maine State Legislature

Honorable Members of the Committee,

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony regarding LD 218 and LD 607, which propose significant changes to the Superintendent Agreement process. As the Superintendent of RSU 34, I have firsthand experience with the importance and complexity of these agreements, which allow families to enroll their children in schools outside of their district of residence when it is deemed in the student's best interest. While the intent of these bills may be to streamline the transfer process, I am deeply concerned about the unintended consequences they may have on school districts and the students we serve.

The current Superintendent Agreement process requires thoughtful collaboration between school administrators and families. When considering a transfer request, we carefully assess multiple factors, including staffing levels, classroom capacity, resource availability, and the specific needs of the student and their family. These decisions are made with the best interests of all students in mind, ensuring that the receiving and sending districts can maintain a high standard of education while balancing operational realities.

LD 218 would automatically renew transfer agreements annually unless there are issues such as chronic absenteeism or significant disciplinary concerns. This approach fails to account for the ever-changing dynamics within our schools. Enrollment patterns fluctuate, staffing levels vary, and the financial landscape shifts from year to year. By removing the ability to re-evaluate agreements on an annual basis, districts may find themselves unable to effectively manage class sizes, budget constraints, and programming for all students.

LD 607 mandates that school districts must approve Superintendent Agreements if the receiving district has available capacity, with limited other considerations. This proposal overlooks the broader implications of student transfers. Capacity alone does not determine a school's ability to effectively support incoming students. Schools must also consider transportation logistics, special education services, extracurricular offerings, and maintaining equitable opportunities for all students. Stripping districts of their ability to holistically assess transfer requests could lead to unanticipated financial strain and disruptions in educational continuity.

These bills disregard the nuanced decision-making process that superintendents and school boards engage in when approving or denying transfer requests. They fail to acknowledge the real-time challenges districts face, including staffing shortages, shifts in funding, and the need to maintain equitable class sizes. By limiting local control, LD 218 and LD 607 could create undue burdens on school districts, ultimately impacting the quality of education for all students.

I urge the Legislature to consider the long-term implications of these bills and to uphold the integrity of the Superintendent Agreement process. Local school districts must retain the ability to make informed, case-by-case decisions that balance the needs of students, families, and school communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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