

## **TESTIMONY OF JONATHAN MOODY**

**Superintendent of Schools**

**MSAD #54**

**Canaan, Cornville, Mercer, Norridgewock, Skowhegan, Smithfield**

### **SUBMITTED TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS AGAINST ADOPTION OF LD 607**

**April 2, 2025**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Education Committee, I am Jonathan Moody, Superintendent of Schools in MSAD 54, serving the towns of Canaan, Cornville, Mercer, Norridgewock, Skowhegan and Smithfield. I write to you in opposition to LD 607.

Like many districts, we have several superintendent agreements with neighboring schools designed to support both our students and our school communities. I have been fortunate to work closely with the State Board of Education on this topic and would like to share my experience and recommendations below.

1 – Superintendent agreements are commonly approved by superintendents to support the best interest of students: MSAD 54 had 125 agreement requests this year, 19 were denied, and 106 were approved. Although there is a perception that the current statute does not allow for agreements, it does, and although I believe it could be improved, it is working.

2 – Students’ “interest” is an important part of the current statutory language and is there for good reason. Superintendents currently review agreements and discuss the details to determine what is in the best interest of students and their school communities. These are thoughtful determinations that consider many educational factors that impact a child’s success in school. LD 607 fails to recognize many of the factors that are considered, as it takes the decision-making process out of the hands of the educational professionals who know the students best. To remove the review process would be a significant step backwards and would negatively impact students and schools.

3 – LD 607 would essentially allow school choice state-wide without thought to the inequities that it would most certainly create for students across the state. It is unlikely that students in poverty or those whose families have limited means of support would be able to access school choice. I have countless examples in my own communities of the barriers that exist for our children in poverty; transportation is the most likely barrier for our families, but it is certainly not the only one. LD 607 would have unintended consequences that would create inequities for students.

4 – This bill considers only “capacity” in determining if a district can deny a request – this approach fails to understand the reality that exists in public schools. Although a district may have capacity in a school or in a class, it very well may not have ability to provide an appropriate education for the student in question. When considering a student with an IEP, it might be that

the child's disability calls for supports that the district is unable to provide. Currently, Superintendents assess these situations with consideration from knowledgeable staff to determine that although there may be "capacity" at one school, it may be far better for that child to attend their district of residence as that school may be better able to provide the services outlined in the student's individual plan. As written, LD 607 would lead to burdens being placed on districts, which would have potentially far-reaching impacts, including negative impacts to students currently enrolled.

5 – Although superintendent agreements do occur somewhat frequently as I indicated above, they are the exception to the rule for a reason. School funding has significant impacts to local budgets and local taxes. The open-door policy this bill would create would potentially pose significant hardships to our communities, especially smaller more rural communities, as they work to balance the impact of rising costs on taxpayers. An example might be a classroom of 20 4<sup>th</sup> graders where 6 students suddenly decide to leave to go to another district. The school of residence cannot cut a teacher when the class size is reduced from 20 to 14, and yet the school loses funding potentially equal to that of a teacher. In situations like these how will communities plan for these changes or avoid passing these costs on to taxpayers?

Although well-intended, I believe LD 607 would negatively impact our schools and our students. Later this session you will see a bill that was designed in conjunction with the State Board of Education, Maine Superintendents and Maine DOE to bring clarity and consistency to the agreement process. I believe that that bill is a far better approach to creating consistency and fairness state-wide and I would ask that you consider supporting its passage in this legislative session. Finally, I ask that you reach out with any questions you may have, as this, like many topics in schools, is complex. I can't emphasize enough that a bill like LD607, although well-intended, has the potential to have far-reaching negative impacts for schools and schoolchildren should it be implemented as written.

Thank you,



Jonathan Moody

Superintendent of Schools

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