

April 15, 2025

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

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

My name is Patti Forster, and I am a longtime educator at Camden Hills Regional High School with over three decades of classroom experience. I currently serve as president of the Maine Council for English Language Arts. I am here today to testify in opposition to LD 919, which would require affirmative written parental permission before any school-administered survey or questionnaire identifying a student by name could be given to a minor.

While parental involvement in education is vital and something I strongly support, this bill creates unnecessary barriers to gathering critical information that schools and communities rely on to support student well-being, academic achievement, and safe school climates.

Surveys and questionnaires that include student names are often used with care and purpose, such as in school climate assessments, mental health screenings, and needs-based supports for at-risk students. These tools help educators and school counselors identify students in need of intervention, social-emotional support, or academic assistance. Requiring prior written permission for each instance of use risks delaying—or entirely preventing—timely support for vulnerable students.

Current practices already follow federal and state regulations under laws like the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA), which provides parents the right to review surveys and opt their child out of participation. The shift to an "opt-in" model proposed by LD 919 adds a bureaucratic hurdle that could dramatically reduce participation in surveys that help schools identify issues, improve programs, and better understand students' experiences.

This bill may also disproportionately impact students whose parents are harder to reach due to language barriers, work schedules, housing instability, or other challenges. These are often the students whose voices most need to be heard. When survey participation drops, the data becomes less representative and less useful, weakening our ability to respond promptly to student needs.

Maine educators are professionals who use surveys not as invasive tools, but as vital instruments for improving the school experience for all students. LD 919 undermines this work and would have a chilling effect on our ability to respond to student voices and support student well-being.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge this committee to vote ought not to pass for LD 919. Let us continue to engage families in meaningful ways while also trusting educators and school leaders to use data responsibly and in service of students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patti Forster". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patti Forster