

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

L.D. 1714

AN ACT TO CREATE A NEW PATHWAY TO LICENSURE TO DRIVE SCHOOL BUSES

April 22, 2025

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and esteemed members of the Transportation Committee, I am Steven Bailey, Executive Director of the Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and the Maine School Superintendents Association in support of L.D. 1714, An Act to Create a New Pathway to Licensure to Drive School Buses.

The shortage of school bus drivers has become frustratingly common in Maine and across the country – particularly since the onset of the pandemic in 2020. The issue has permeated nearly every school district. The Maine Department of Education acknowledges a “serious and real shortage” of bus drivers. Districts have had to cut routes, double runs, or in the worst cases, outright cancel school transportation for some students.

The Lewiston School District was forced to cancel or adjust routes nearly every day for much of a full school year because of driver shortages. In RSU 4, in the Sabattus region, a bus route was suspended for nearly six months because of a lack of drivers. This issue is placing more of a burden on children and families – and is particularly harsh on parents with tight work schedules and limited transportation, who do not have the option of driving their child to school. This hurts student attendance at a crucial moment in which we need students in our classrooms to help them continue to recover from pandemic learning loss.

Maine school districts are working to boost pay, add new incentives, and provide free Commercial Driver License training to get more drivers in the door. But the shortage persists. Even with these changes, many applicants find the process to obtain a CDL to be intimidating and time consuming, causing schools to lose out on quality applicants.

That is why our school districts are in full support of L.D. 1714. This bill would complement all of these existing efforts by creating a new, separate licensure allowing a driver to obtain a license to drive a school bus without needing a CDL. Obtaining a CDL requires extensive commitment – often several months of training and the need to pass written and skills tests. We believe the requirements in L.D. 1714 would offer a more streamlined process through the use of a “learner’s permit” and eventually a skills test. We believe this could bring new candidates into the profession.

Importantly, by abiding to the requirements of the Commercial Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1986, this process would not compromise knowledge, skills, or safety. Bus drivers have our children’s lives in their hands every day, and we know how important it is that they are reliable, caring, and safe. We believe the new process outlined in L.D. 1714 would balance those important values while bringing new candidates through the door – improving the reliability of school bus routes and helping to boost student attendance and achievement. While our associations know other changes are needed, such as reducing requirements such as the “under-the-hood” test, L.D. 1714 would make a meaningful difference in addressing a crucial workforce challenge and would improve education for thousands of students and schools across our state. We urge you to support this bill.