

NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST – ALL PFML BILLS
L.D. 406, 1249, 1273, 1307, 1400

MSBA IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 1712

MSBA AND MSSA OPPOSED TO L.D. 575

April 23, 2025

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and esteemed members of the Committee on Labor, I am Eileen King, the Deputy 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. We represent more than 1,700 school board members across the state, as well as more than 200 superintendents and their districts.

Our associations do not wish to weigh into the larger debate over Paid Family and Medical Leave and whether it is a prudent policy for businesses and other employers. However, we do wish to speak about its potential impact on our school buildings and classrooms, which has led to deep concerns regarding the ability of our schools to operate and best serve every Maine student.

Maine superintendents and school board members work as hard as possible to have an experienced, knowledgeable educator in front of every student, every day. This has become even more important after the COVID pandemic: there is no denying that students have fallen behind, and Maine's public schools are doing everything possible to help them catch up. They are implementing attendance best practices, strengthening math and literacy programs, and finding individualized ways to help students graduate.

However, school districts routinely share with us that a major challenge towards achieving these goals is teacher absenteeism – far more teachers missing more days of school than before the pandemic. The costs of substitute teachers have tripled in some districts.

We all agree that teachers need and deserve time off to attend to their needs, but this trend is very concerning. School leaders must put more substitutes in front of our students, instead of qualified, knowledgeable educators. [Research clearly shows](#) teacher absenteeism hurts student learning: when an educator misses 10 days of school, students' math scores drop – the equivalent of the difference between a student being taught by a novice teacher and an experienced one.

Our schools have deep concerns that the statewide Paid Family and Medical Leave program will only exacerbate this challenge, making it more difficult to operate our schools and leading to worse achievement for our students. We firmly believe in ensuring our employees have the benefits and flexibility they need, and we believe our local collective bargaining agreements already make this possible by providing several weeks

of annual paid sick leave, family sick leave, and sick banks, which can often accrue up to more than 120 days. We believe these should remain local decisions, and school administrators express deep concerns that adding PFML on top of this current leave could result in even more extended absences that could exacerbate the state's teacher shortage and lead to worse learning for students.

Massachusetts specifically exempted schools and municipalities from its own PFML program, and we urge your committee to take similar steps in recognition of both the robust benefits that schools already offer, as well as the unique operational requirements that are necessary for government operations. MSSA and MSBA believe L.D. 1400 comes closest towards recognizing the unique situations, though we would advocate for adjusting the language of this bill towards applying to any school district collective bargaining agreements which include "combined sick leave benefits, family sick leave benefits, and sick bank totaling more than 12 weeks."

While our associations do not offer a position on the majority of the PFML bills being considered by the Labor Committee, school board members do support L.D. 1712, which we believe provides a commonsense policy recognizing the importance of paid leave as well as the needs of employers. The language in L.D. 1712 better defines the "undue hardship" provisions and will offer more appropriate and practical guidance to Maine school districts as they seek to implement this law. By including specific statutory language laying out how an employer can determine undue hardship, L.D. 1712 would help Maine school districts best balance their operational needs while still providing robust benefits for educators.

Maine schools have faced many unfunded legislative mandates in recent years that have driven up local school budget costs, and we hope that your committee recognizes how Paid Family and Medical Leave will only further challenge our school districts, increasing expenses, interrupting operations, and worsening student learning. We urge you to consider any ways to address these challenges and improve student learning.