



Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Esteemed Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Amy Allen and I am the Operations Director for the Maine Charter School Commission. I'm submitting testimony today opposing LD #1571 - *"An Act to Modify Certification Standards for Full-time Teachers in Public Charter Schools and for Educational Technicians."*

Current Maine statute requires that all full-time teachers in a public charter school must either hold an appropriate teaching certificate or become certified within 3 years of the date they are hired, except for those with an advanced degree, professional certification or unique expertise or experience in the curricular area in which they teach. The Commission refers to this provision as "uniquely qualified" and requires that public charter schools who hire using this provision have a board-approved policy in place that helps support hiring decisions.

How often is this provision used? Critics will argue that nearly every charter school teacher is uncertified when the reality is that only about 20% of teachers in the charter school portfolio are working as uniquely qualified instructors or working toward certification within 3 years of their date of hire.

Commission staff monitor certification closely to ensure compliance. Several times throughout the school year - using the MDOEs public-facing NEO Staff portal - records for each public charter school employee are reviewed to ensure that (1) they have a valid Criminal History Record Check (CHRC) on file and (2) are properly credentialed.

In many cases, the system returns a "no certification found at this time" message. Why? More often than not it's simply a system issue, not a credentialing issue. For example, a change to a persons last name or a data entry error when entering a social security number or date of birth can return this message when

searching for an employee. When these issues are discovered, Commission staff work with charter school leaders and MDOE certification staff to resolve.

Subsequently, if a teacher has been hired using one of the hiring provisions allowed by statute, there is no way to identify this in the state system. This means that anyone looking at public facing data is led to believe that a violation is occurring when that's simply not the case. Because there is no way to track this at the state level, the Commission keeps track of it internally.

Maine's public charter school students benefit daily from the unique experiences brought into their classrooms – data shows that they perform better on state assessments, are less chronically absent, and exceed state graduation averages and annual goals. If anything, I would argue that this provision should be expanded to allow students from across the state of Maine to benefit from the life experiences being shared in charter school classrooms.

Thank you for reading my testimony. I'll be available during the work session to answer any questions that you may have.