

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 1627

AN ACT REGARDING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION REFORM AND TALENT RETENTION

April 30, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs 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 Maine School Superintendents Association in opposition to L.D. 1627, An Act Regarding Workforce Development, Education Reform and Talent Retention.

While Maine school leaders appreciate the goals of this bill and support efforts to boost students' readiness for the workforce, we believe L.D. 1627 would represent a significant unfunded mandate that could potentially keep some students from graduating.

L.D. 1627 promotes many important initiatives that may help improve Maine students' readiness for life beyond high school. These include:

- Increased training from the DOE for career counselors.
- Strengthening and expanding Extended Learning Opportunity programs, which have proven to be immensely successful in exposing students to local businesses and workforce experiences.
- Competitive grants for training, which could help local colleges, school districts, and CTE centers further expand their ongoing efforts to train students and adults across a wide range of careers.

The expansion of all these initiatives would be welcome and would provide more opportunities for Maine students to discover what they want to pursue following graduation.

However, several other parts of this bill would represent significant state overreach that would place a severe burden on local public schools – likely resulting in significant cost increases at a time when Maine school budgets and taxpayers are already strained.

New Mandates

Section 1 of this bill would require that, by January 1, 2027, all students “must complete an internship, apprenticeship or cooperative education experience that allows the student to attain workforce skills.”

Providing workforce experience is a worthy goal, and as mentioned, schools have already significantly expanded these opportunities through record enrollment in Career & Technical Education, as well as the hiring of Extended Learning Opportunity coordinators at many schools to help facilitate internships and other workforce opportunities. More state investment in these kinds of programs would be welcome and would

allow for an expansion of these crucial opportunities. But L.D. 1627 would instead mandate this approach for every student.

We expect that in order for schools to comply with this new mandate, substantial additional funding would be required for new career counselors, ELO coordinators, and other staff to connect students with local businesses and ensure each experience is appropriately connected to state standards. There would be many other costs to providing these experiences, as well, such as transportation to and from a job site. We appreciate the sponsor's goals, but resources are already stretched thin in many school districts. Requiring every district to take on this new logistical challenge would represent an immense new burden that our local taxpayers cannot afford.

Maine is also a local control state, and this mandate would represent an overreach and add another new graduation requirement for students. Many students already need substantial support to make it to graduation under our current requirements, and we are concerned that adding this additional requirement could keep more students from finishing high school.

This bill would also impose new reporting requirements for school districts to monitor post-graduation outcomes. Schools already track these outcomes to some degree, but this would represent an additional administrative burden.

L.D. 1627 also removes state “incentives for school administrative units that disproportionately steer students toward 4-year postsecondary education institutions” – we would like clarity on what incentives this language is referring to, and how schools could be affected by this proposed change.

School Infrastructure

School leaders are also deeply concerned about Section 7 of this bill, which would require the Maine Department of Education to “redirect infrastructure funds to upgrade career and technical education facilities and equipment to meet industry standards.” Our associations support efforts to improve CTE infrastructure – such as the state's recent \$20 million investment that boosted training programs across Maine – but the language in this bill appears to suggest that funding from other school construction programs, such as the Major Capital School Construction Project and the School Revolving Renovation Fund, would instead be directed towards CTE centers.

This is deeply concerning. The [interim report](#) from the Governor's Commission on School Construction demonstrates that upgrading all of Maine's school building infrastructure could cost as much as \$11 billion. Multiple Maine school buildings have had to shut down because of maintenance issues in recent years. We know far more funding is needed to improve Maine's school infrastructure, yet L.D. 1627 would appear to potentially divert state funding away from other school projects, putting more stress on local school districts to deal with these infrastructure challenges themselves.

For these reasons, we urge your committee to vote “no” on L.D. 1627. While Maine public schools would welcome more investment in CTE programming and expanded internships and other career opportunities for students, this bill would only lead to increased costs and mandates that Maine school districts and local taxpayers cannot handle.