



Maine Education Association

Jesse Hargrove President | Beth French Vice President | Jaye Rich Treasurer
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

Testimony

Neither For Nor Against

LD 1098: An Act to Ensure Equal Access to a Full School Day for All Students

Jan Kosinski, Government Relations Director, Maine Education Association

Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

May 1st, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and other members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Jan Kosinski, and I am the Director of Government Relations for the Maine Education Association (MEA). The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators, including teachers and other educators in nearly every public school in the state, as well as full-time faculty and other professional and support staff in both the University of Maine and Community College systems. Thousands of retired educators continue their connection and advocacy work through the MEA- Retired program.

I offer this testimony today on behalf of the MEA NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST to LD 1098, *An Act to Ensure Equal Access to a Full School Day for All Students*.

We certainly want and need all students in school. We never want to see student schedules abbreviated for any reason, unless it is part of an agreed upon part of the student's educational plan, which is sometimes the case for high school students who pursue work/study options.

However, we have consistently told this Committee of the dire workforce shortages plaguing our schools and we surmise the circumstances this bill tries to solve are related to the shortages schools face. These shortages continue to get worse, not better. One can review the teacher shortages areas the state reports every year as part of our federal reporting requirements, and you will see that list has expanded over the years. Special education teachers remain among the most dire shortage areas in our state. There is no shortage of shortages. Every teaching position in our state is now on the shortage list.

In addition, I have shared with this Committee in previous testimony that approximately 1,400 teachers per year are retiring or quitting, while our state's educator prep programs produce approximately four hundred graduates per year to fill those 1,400 positions. In the recent past, the Legislature has approved substantial revisions to the teacher certification standards to make it easier for individuals to attain teacher certificates who otherwise would not be authorized to work in our schools. Yet we still have shortages. The Legislature has approved additional funding for ed tech training programs and residency programs for teachers. Yet, the shortages remain.

35 Community Drive, Augusta, ME 04330 | 1349 Broadway, Bangor, ME 04401
PO Box 310, Caribou, ME 04736 | 29 Christopher Toppi Drive, South Portland ME 04106

207-622-5866 | 207-888-2070 fax | www.maineaa.org



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We feel strongly, and others testified to this effect, including superintendents, that we must raise the minimum teacher salary as called for in LD 34, *An Act to Increase the Minimum Teacher Salary* if we have any hope of stemming this tide and having the teachers and staffing necessary so schools can accommodate all students.

I must also add that if we want to retain teachers in our schools, we must address the challenging student behaviors they face and increase mental health supports for students and provide more tools to address the behaviors educators face.

Last year, the Legislature passed a new minimum wage increase for hourly support staff. We are grateful for this increase. The new law is set to take effect on July 1, 2025, and will set a new hourly minimum wage of 125% for ed techs and 115% for all other hourly support staff such as bus drivers. We remain extremely hopeful that this new minimum wage will reduce shortages of ed techs especially, who are extremely integral in school communities.

While we support the overall intent of this bill, we remain deeply concerned about the dearth of qualified professionals ready to work in our schools. The salaries/wages are too low, and the job is too hard. We believe addressing the workforce shortages could help prevent the scenarios this bill hopes to address.

Thank you for your time and your service and I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.