



Testimony in Support of LD 1853:

“An Act to Establish an Educational Tax Credit Program to Help Parents Pay for Nonpublic School Tuition and Fees”

Senator Grohoski, Representative Cloutier, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Taxation, my name is Harris Van Pate and I serve as policy analyst for Maine Policy Institute. Maine Policy is a free-market think tank, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that advocates for individual liberty and economic freedom in Maine. I am here today to testify in strong support of LD 1853, establishing a refundable tax credit for parents of eligible students attending nonpublic schools.

This legislation marks a bold step toward Maine's more equitable, flexible, and parent-centered education system. For too long, ZIP code and family income have limited children's educational opportunities. LD 1853 begins to change that by allowing families, regardless of socioeconomic status, to choose the educational environment that best meets their child's needs.

Supporting Families and Expanding Opportunity

LD 1853 acknowledges that parents are the primary educators of their children and empowers them to direct state education dollars in a way that best supports their family. The proposed refundable tax credit—up to 70% of the state's average per-pupil spending—represents a substantial, yet responsible, investment in parental choice.

Research and experience from nationwide studies affirm the benefits of programs like this. In states such as Florida, tax credit scholarships and Education Savings Accounts have improved academic outcomes and parental satisfaction while delivering cost savings to taxpayers.¹ Surveys show that 60% of Americans support education tax credits, increasing to 76% for K-12 parents.² Not only are these policies effective, but they are also widely popular.

Fiscal Responsibility and Efficient Use of Public Resources

Critics often claim that school choice drains resources from public education. On the contrary, LD 1853 is designed with fiscal prudence in mind. Because the credit is limited to 70% of the state's per-pupil spending, the state retains 30% of funding per

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<https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2018-10-Surveying-Florida-Scholarship-Families-by-Jason-B-edrick-and-Lindsey-Burke.pdf>

² <https://yeseverykidfoundation.org/national-poll-reinforces-strong-support-for-education-freedom-policies/>



participating student, providing savings or reinvestment opportunities within the broader education system.

Arizona's Empowerment Scholarship Account program, for example, not only expanded educational opportunity for over 70,000 students, but also led to per-pupil spending increases in public schools by reducing pressure on class sizes and fixed costs. Maine can expect similar outcomes.³

Accountability through Choice

Unlike traditional public schools, which often operate with limited direct accountability to parents, this program introduces a market-based mechanism. Parents can take their child and the associated credit elsewhere if a school fails to meet expectations. This dynamic naturally incentivizes quality, responsiveness, and innovation.

Conclusion

Maine Policy Institute strongly supports LD 1853 because it affirms parents' rights, respects educational diversity, and aligns public funding with student needs rather than rigid bureaucratic structures. We urge the committee to pass this legislation and take a decisive step toward building an education system that puts families first. Thank you for your time and consideration.

³ <https://loveyourschool.org/arizona/2023/11/28/esas/>