

Savannah Mirisola-Sullivan
Portland
LD 1383
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Portland, ME
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Good morning Senator Baldacci, Senator Beebe-Center, Senator Martin, and Honorable Members of the Committee on State and Local Government. Thank you for your time. My name is Savannah Mirisola-Sullivan, and I'm a resident of Portland, Maine. I am here to share my support for LD 1383, An Act To Require the State To Divest Itself of Assets Invested in Corporations That Contribute to Genocide and Human Rights Abuses.

I've worked in public schools for eighteen years. As a fourth grade teacher in Portland Public Schools for eight years, I am a recipient of MPERS. Our classrooms in Portland are abuzz with diverse languages, cultures, and perspectives, one of the things I love most about teaching here. Fourth grade in particular is an interesting developmental age. As students develop more independence, they are also exploring their social identities within the unique context of their community. As a result, they are deeply passionate about justice and ideas of fairness. They build their empathy muscles in developmentally appropriate ways as they learn about the Black Civil Rights movement, Wabanaki studies and settler-colonialism, animal and human immigration, and of course, current events.

Students are applying these ideas of fairness in real time as they see stories on the news about community members being taken by masked ICE agents. There are empty chairs in classrooms where students have been kidnapped by ICE, and where families are keeping their children home, too afraid to risk the commute to school. This terror has escalated in the last couple of weeks as threats flood in of an influx of ICE activity in Maine. Schools are having to create safety plans rather than lesson plans, and no amount of care, compassion, or community circles can ease the fear that students are holding.

Neuroscience tells us of the impacts of this kind of fear and stress on young people. Cortisol blocks critical parts of the brain, making it impossible for students to engage in process and store new learning, or access critical executive functioning skills like impulse control.

Right now, MPERS is complicit in this fear and terror suffocating our classrooms and communities by investing in companies that are contributing directly to detention of our neighbors, particularly corporations that fuel the majority of deportation flights like Signature Aviation, Palantir, and Boeing. These corporations also profit off of the genocide in Palestine, where tens of thousands of children have been killed or injured, and schools have been shuttered or destroyed. These companies are in direct conflict with the work of keeping children safe, a teacher's most critical job. Our pensions should reflect our values as educators and state employees. By divesting from these holdings that make up less than 1% of the total pension fund, a move that carries little financial risk, we have the opportunity to directly contribute to student safety here in Maine.

Teachers deserve to retire with dignity, and our MPERS investment team has shown its strength in balancing the multi-billion dollar pension fund against challenges and risks. There is also precedent for this kind of divestment over the past many decades. We can look to fossil fuel divestment or divestment from the South African apartheid system as models for how making morally aligned state financial decisions can ultimately grow our pension investments and respect the work of state employees.

All children deserve to learn in safety, and trust that the decisions of adults in their community will keep them safe. LD1383 would make it easier for our state and our schools to align with these values of safety and belonging. Thank you for the

opportunity to share my experience with the Committee. I urge you to vote “Ought to pass” on LD 1383 in support of teachers and students. Thank you.