



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 2204: An Act to Allow Schools to Expel Students for Committing Sexual Assault

Jesse Hargrove, President, Maine Education Association

Before The Education and Cultural Affairs committee

February 25th, 2026

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

My name is Jesse Hargrove, I am a high school social studies teacher on leave to serve as Maine Education Association President. The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators. Our members include teachers and other educators in nearly every public school in the state, full-time faculty and other professional and support staff in both the University of Maine and Community College systems, and thousands of retired educators.

I offer this testimony today on behalf of the MEA Neither For Nor Against LD 2204, *An Act to Allow Schools to Expel Students for Committing Sexual Assault*.

The Maine Education Association emphatically believes schools should be safe places for students to learn free of sexual assault and harassment. However this bill presents a number of concerns without offering remedy. First, the bill explicitly provides expulsion to students of all grades and ages, particularly those in grade 5 or below. The MEA has consistently opposed expulsion for students in elementary grade levels, particularly grade five and under. These children are in the most formative years. Students who are disciplined with expulsion are at an increased risk for dropping out of school and future involvement with the juvenile justice system. About 40 % of students with a history of juvenile incarceration are re-incarcerated as adults. This has become known as the "School to Prison Pipeline".ⁱ Furthermore, expulsions are disproportionately applied to students who identify as Black, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Students with Disabilities particularly attention disorders, intellectual disabilities, or emotional disturbances, and those who identify as LGBTQ+.ⁱⁱ



Maine Education Association

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

Time away from school hurts kids and sets them up for long-term struggles with the law and loss of economic opportunity. The National Sexual Violence Resource Council (NSVRC) suggests that people who commit sexual abuse are portrayed as “monsters” making it more challenging to perceive the risks and warning signs. Common factors of people committing sexual abuse a family history of conflict or violence; a childhood history of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse; poverty; lack of institutional support; and exposure to explicit material. Children with these backgrounds need more support from their schools and communities. Furthermore, the NSVRC also suggests that youth who abuse “often do not reoffend, and they are generally very receptive to treatment.”ⁱⁱⁱ

We recognize the intent of the bill is to make schools safer for students by reducing risks of sexual assault. It neglects to address underlying causes or risk factors, nor does it establish systemic supports for youth who have committed sexual assault. These children and young people, who are likely from under-resourced environments and coping with their own traumatic experiences, will be further alienated, and subject to further economic and legal challenges. We believe there are other more supportive ways to invest in our schools and students to support children with risk factors to more effectively prevent sexual assault. Furthermore, we see this bill as recognition of need for Behavioral and Mental Services called for in LD 858 and would recommend further investment in these preventative measures.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jesse Hargrove", is written over a light gray rectangular background.

Jesse Hargrove
President, Maine Education Association

ⁱ Jain, M.D., Susanna “AAP Policy: School Suspension, Expulsion harm students, disproportionately affect those with marginalized identities”, *AAP News*, October 1, 2024 American Academy of Pediatrics, Accessed February 24, 2026, <https://publications.aap.org/aapnews/news/29986/AAP-policy-School-suspension-expulsion-harm>

ⁱⁱ Jain, M.D. Susanna, Padrez M.D., Ryan, “School Suspensions & Expulsions: How They Fail Kids – and Schools”, [healthychildren.org](https://healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/school/Pages/why-school-suspensions-and-expulsions-are-failing-kids-and-schools.aspx), October 1, 2024, Accessed, <https://healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/school/Pages/why-school-suspensions-and-expulsions-are-failing-kids-and-schools.aspx>, February 24, 2026

ⁱⁱⁱ National Sexual Violence Resource Center “Who Commits Sexual Assault and Abuse” accessed February 23, 2026, <https://www.nsvrc.org/who-commits-sexual-assault-and-abuse/>