

**TESTIMONY
OF
FERN DESJARDINS, CHAIR
MAINE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
And The Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Hearing Date: February 13, 2023, 1:00 PM

L.D. 258 “An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025”

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Fern Desjardins and I am the chair of the Maine State Board of Education. I am here today on behalf of the board to present testimony for the departmental items in the biennial budget bill.

The state board consists of 11 members. The Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A, §401-A gives the State Board of Education the primary responsibilities for formulating policy, advising the Commissioner of Education, and enforcing regulatory requirements. In §405 of the statutes and through other rules the board is delegated powers and duties that include, but are not limited to: make recommendations to the Legislature for the efficient conduct of the public schools; approve the formation of School Administrative Districts and Community School Districts; grant permission for administrative units to enter into agreements for cooperative educational purposes; develop and adopt a plan for the establishment of career and technical education centers; approve standards for school construction; approve school construction projects for state aid; work as a partner with the Department of Education regarding the Essential Programs and Services school finance process; obtain information regarding applications for granting degrees and make a recommendation to the Legislature; accredit programs at institutions of higher education that train educators; establish standards for the certification of educators; participate in the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) through the New England Board of higher Education; serve as the state agency for administering Carl Perkins federal funds; and to review student transfers requested by a parent or superintendent dissatisfied with the decision of the Commissioner of Education. The board also appoints three of its members to serve on the Maine Charter School Commission.

The State Board of Education’s baseline budget is on page A-258 of the *General Fund Recommended Biennial Budget 2024-2025, Part A* and there are two initiatives included on the same page. The board’s General Fund request is \$201,098 in FY24 and \$202,096 in FY25. The board requested four budget initiatives but the Department of Administration and Financial Services (DAFS) moved only two of the initiatives forward in the biennial budget.

The first initiative provides an appropriation of \$6,000 in each year of the biennium for per diem payments to board members. Per diem payments to board members are authorized by Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A, section 401, subsection 3. This initiative increases funding for per diem payments for two reasons: (1) based on the board being at full membership for the first time in a number of years, and (2) the increase in committee work by board members as it relates to the activities described above and to the milestones in the state board's 5-year strategic plan.

The second initiative provides funding to reorganize the Secretary Specialist position to an Office Specialist II position. The state board has only one staff member, a secretary specialist. We requested to have an office specialist instead of a secretary specialist because the skills required of the office specialist are at a higher level and more in alignment with the state board's needs. The board seeks additional help to carry out its many roles and responsibilities in a diligent and consistent manner. The board's workload requires members to dedicate a significant amount of time in committees to accomplish all its responsibilities. Three newly appointed board members resigned in recent years because of the time commitment. The board requested an executive director to provide leadership and consistency, like in many other organizations. DAFS chose to include the office specialist initiative but not the executive director request. The other initiative dropped by DAFS was a budget request for contracted services to conduct research for the board.

I would be happy to answer any questions the committees may have or to provide additional information regarding the proposed budget initiatives in this bill.