



Maine Education Association

Grace Leavitt President | Jesse Hargrove Vice President | Beth French Treasurer
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

**Testimony
In Support of
LD 335 An Act to Improve Educator Certification Response Times
Grace Leavitt, President, Maine Education Association
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
March 14, 2023**

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

My name is Grace Leavitt. My pronouns are she, her, hers. I am serving as President of the Maine Education Association while on leave from teaching Spanish in MSAD 51. I have over 43 years of classroom teaching experience with 20 years as a National Board Certified teacher. The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators in our Maine system of public education in pre-K-12 schools as well as in our institutions of higher education, both the University of Maine System and the Maine Community College System, along with students in teacher prep programs as well as many retired educators.

I am here to testify on behalf of MEA in support of LD 335, An Act to Improve Educator Certification Response Times.

MEA has heard from some educators that they have waited for several weeks, or longer, to hear that their application for certification has been processed and that they are deemed officially certified. Some examples: an ed tech hired for a teaching position for which they were qualified, doing the work of a teacher, but who was classified as a long-term sub while waiting to receive their teaching certificate. Another ed tech with a similar situation—there was such a lag time in receiving their teaching certificate that it has ended up that they have been going without the benefits they should have been receiving for several months now. This is not just about certification for teachers. For someone waiting to receive the approval from the DOE for certification as an ed tech, being classified as a substitute means not having the same pay and benefits as others doing the same work.

These are just a few of the instances we've been hearing about.

To be fair, the Maine Department of Education did work hard to address what was a huge backlog previously, and the timeframe is reported now to be three to four weeks for most applications. Yet even three to four weeks can mean that a district has someone hired, and paid, as a substitute teacher or ed tech while awaiting notification of being certified. That is not only a financial hardship for some, but also an unsettling situation to find oneself in.

We recognize that the DOE has worked to reduce the timeframe and also that there has been a change made to the process that allows an educator to submit their renewal materials before they are due yet maintain the same renewal date, thus attempting to reduce the inevitable 'logjam' of submissions at the end of the academic year. This is potentially a help, and MEA has helped to alert our members to this change, yet knowing what the demands on our educators are during the school year, we can only hope that some will take advantage of this change and submit their materials early on to reduce the influx in

35 Community Drive, Augusta, ME 04330 | 1349 Broadway, Bangor, ME 04401
7 Hatch Drive, Suite 220, Box 310, Caribou, ME 04736 | 29 Christopher Toppi Drive, South Portland ME 04106

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

June and make things more manageable for the certification department. (In full confession, I have my documentation ready to go and have had it since September of this year, but still have not found the time to submit it—though I promise I will do so very soon!)

Of even more concern is the number of conditional and emergency certifications that we are now seeing. These are needed, of course, for districts to do what they can to fill the many vacancies our schools are experiencing due to the ongoing educator shortage. With the increased number of conditional and emergency certifications, we need to ensure that educators holding these certificates are being monitored appropriately and reminded, if needed, to be sure that they are making the necessary progress toward becoming fully certified so that no one falls through the cracks and runs up against the time constraints that are necessarily in place for these certifications.

Additionally, we have heard of instances where reciprocity was denied to educators coming from other states and have to wonder if this happened, at least some times, due to the need for additional employees in the certification department to review transcripts in more depth.

Lastly, but not at all least, there have been a number of changes to certification rules just this past year. Many people have questions about if and how these changes affect their initial certification and there will be many questions that educators who are seeking to renew their certificates will have as they tend to this. There needs to be sufficient staff in the certification department to handle this so that educators are getting the information they need in a timely fashion and are not experiencing delays that will likely be frustrating at best, or a deterrent at worst.

MEA believes that passage of LD 335 is yet another way to help address the educator shortage we are seeing and urges your support.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

Grace Leavitt