



Maine Education Association

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**Testimony
In Support of**

**LD 477 Resolve, Directing the Department of Education, Maine School Safety
Center to Convene a Stakeholder Group to Develop the Best Practices for Lockdown Drills and
Allowing Parents to Opt Out of Lockdown Drills for Their Children
Grace Leavitt, President, Maine Education Association
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
March 21, 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 477 Resolve, Directing the Department of Education, Maine School Safety Center to Convene a Stakeholder Group to Develop Best Practices for Lockdown Drills and Allowing Parents to Opt Out of Lockdown Drills for Their Children.

Before going on leave to serve as President of the MEA, I participated in the required lockdown drills that we began to have several years ago. The first time we did this, the instructions were to shut and lock the classroom door (only to learn that some of the doors could only be locked from the outside, requiring the teacher to go into the hallway and possibly encountering danger), and to turn off lights and cover the door window with a curtain (which our doors didn't have, so many of us taped a large sheet of construction paper over the window), close the shades on the exterior windows and put a color coded paper in the exterior window (green for everyone was in the room and safe; red for an emergency or someone missing from the room), and of course keep all the students silent, off their phones, seated on the floor in a corner of the room where no one would be visible from any of the windows. If a student was missing from the room (they had just left the room prior to the drill, for example), even if they knocked at the door to be let in, we were told under no circumstances to let them in. Students were told to hide in a stall in a restroom or wherever they could hide if the drill caught them outside of their assigned classroom. Of course, we all knew it was a drill, and most took it pretty lightly or were annoyed at the interruption or inconvenience. But when a drill happened soon after there had indeed been a tragic school shooting in another state, the drill caused at least some degree of angst in us all, and a great deal of anxiety—even trauma—in at last a few.

Then came the change in instructions—do not put a color-coded paper in the window—it would be a sign that people were in the room.

Then I remember hearing from an educator in another district about A.L.I.C.E. trainings that they were being trained in—Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate. The trainings had a cost, but they

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seemed to make sense. That is, they made sense until I started hearing how some—both students and staff—were feeling traumatized when undergoing such trainings. The negative effect was substantial for some.

Other trainings are being done—some with the same traumatic impact. In an article, “Mitigating Psychological Effects of Lockdowns”, on the website for the National Association of School Psychologists, it states: “Armed assailant drills that are not conducted appropriately may cause physical and psychological harm to students, staff, and not to mention disrupting the overall learning environment.”¹

In the position I hold, I have received phone calls from parents who are concerned about the impact of such drills on their children. I spoke with one of our members who said that their school proceeded to hold a scheduled drill the day after the horrific tragedy in Uvalde. He was shaken, to say the least.

And, unfortunately, I have heard from some members that the training they have for these drills in their district does not include all staff, but often leaves out many of the support staff.

The MEA and the National Education Association with whom we are affiliated, along with our fellow state associations, are working to urge lawmakers to enact laws that help prevent these all too frequent acts of gun violence in our country. We will continue to do so. As a country we must do better to keep our children and our communities safe. It is outrageous that our schools even need to have lockdown drills. But until we do have better laws to address this issue, the very least—the very least—that we can do is be sure that we are protecting our children and the adults who work with them by convening this stakeholder group to examine and arrive at the best possible practices that will be implemented in each school district.

Our children’s very lives depend on our doing our best to keep them safe.

We urge you to vote unanimously ‘ought to pass’ on LD 477.

¹<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/systems-level-prevention/mitigating-psychological-effects-of-lockdowns>