



Maine Children's Alliance

Advocating for the well-being of all Maine families.

Testimony of Rita Furlow

Maine Children's Alliance

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs

LD 1526

An Act to Provide Grants to Support Reading Proficiency Programming in Schools

May 2, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty and Representative Brennan, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Rita Furlow. I am the Senior Policy Analyst at the Maine Children's Alliance. I am here today in support of LD 1526, *An Act to Provide Grants to Support Reading Proficiency Programming in Schools*. The Maine Children's Alliance is a statewide non-partisan, non-profit research and advocacy organization whose mission is to promote sound public policies to improve the lives of children, youth, and families in Maine.

At the Maine Children's Alliance, we believe that Maine's future success depends upon how our children are doing today. We know from research that reading proficiently by the end of third grade is particularly important because it is closely correlated with success throughout school and life. Through third grade, children are learning to how read. After third grade, they are reading to learn. Mastery of reading becomes a critical component in children's ability to keep up academically by third grade.

In 2010, the Annie E. Casey Foundation released a seminal report on the importance of young children learning to read – Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters. The report found that children who read proficiently by the end of third grade are more likely to graduate from high school and are more likely to find a job that can adequately support their families. The report brought much attention to the importance of early reading and literacy.

Unfortunately, too few children are mastering the early reading skills they will need to succeed in a world economy that requires a highly educated workforce. Maine's reading scores over the past decade have been stagnant. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) highlights the income disparities that exist on Maine's 4th grade reading. The 2022 NAEP report for Maine found a 26 point difference between those who are eligible vs not eligible for school lunch.

Fourth Grade Reading in Maine

Location	Achievement Level	Data Type	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2022
Maine	Below Basic	Percent	30%	29%	27%	30%	30%	29%	29%	33%	33%	40%
	At Or Above Basic	Percent	70%	71%	73%	70%	70%	71%	71%	67%	67%	60%
	Below Proficient	Percent	64%	65%	64%	65%	68%	63%	64%	64%	64%	71%
	At Or Above Proficient	Percent	36%	35%	36%	35%	32%	37%	36%	36%	36%	29%

Fourth grade public school students' reading achievement levels, as measured and defined by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, <https://datacenter.kidscount.org>.

Teaching children how to read is a fundamental responsibility of our schools. We should ensure that all teachers in Maine have the tools they need to teach reading. We support efforts to provide funding to improve reading proficiency in Maine – particularly for early elementary (Pre-K through Grade 3) school teachers. We urge the committee to amend the language in the bill to limit any funding to programs and practices that are based on cognitive and scientific research. We should be providing funding to programs that we know are effective and evidence based. The committee should also consider whether the Department of Education could provide this training across the state – see pages 11-12 of the Department report.

Improving children’s early reading skills is an essential step toward increasing the number of children who will succeed academically and do well in life. We urge the committee to view this bill as the beginning of an effort to ensure that all Maine children become proficient readers. The report and appendix document from the Department provide the Committee with a start on ways to improve how children learn to read in our state. Changing decades of practice will not happen overnight and ultimately must include changes at teacher preparation programs. We urge you to make a start by supporting this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration and attention to this important issue.

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For additional information see:

The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2010). *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*. Baltimore, MD: Author. Retrieved from www.aecf.org

The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2013). *Early Warning Confirmed: A Research Update on Third-Grade Reading*. Baltimore, MD: Author. Retrieved from www.aecf.org;

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)
<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/states/scores/?grade=4>

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/line/5116-fourth-grade-reading-achievement-levels?loc=21&loct=2#2/21/false/1729,871,573,36,867,38,18,16,14,13/asc/1185,1186,1187,1188/11560>

Moats, Louisa, Teaching Reading Is Rocket Science: What Expert Teachers of Reading Should Know and Be Able To Do. Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers. <https://www.readingrockets.org/sites/default/files/teaching-reading-is-rocket-science-2020.pdf>

Hanford, Emily, Sold a Story: How Teaching Kids to Read Went So Wrong. 2022. <https://features.apmreports.org/sold-a-story/>