



## **Maine Education Association**

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### **Testimony**

### **In Support**

### **LD 1756: An Act to Protect Employee Freedom of Speech**

**Ben Grant – General Council, Maine Education Association**

**Before the Labor and Housing Committee**

**May 9, 2023**

My name is Ben Grant (he/him) and I am proud to serve as General Counsel for the Maine Education Association (MEA). The MEA represents 24,000 educators in the state of Maine, including teachers and other professionals in nearly every public school in the state and faculty and other professional staff in the University of Maine and Community College Systems.

I appear before you today to express the MEA's support for LD 1756. We believe this law is an important step in ensuring freedom of speech in the workplace for all employees. You may be tempted to think of this bill in terms of what employers and employees say to each other in the workplace, as it comes out of the concept of a "captive audience" meeting. However, the bill does nothing to restrict the content of any speech that an Employer wants to deliver to his or her Employees. Rather – and this is the key part – this bill provides a broad protection to all Employees from adverse employment actions for refusing to participate in speech. Again, this bill is about allowing employees to exercise freedom of choice over what they must hear. The right to decline a conversation is just as important as the right to speak your mind. We should not allow our workplaces to be exempt from this principle. Rather, we should guarantee an even playing field when it comes to spreading ideas and persuasion.

This proposal is squarely in keeping with the State's traditional role in regulating minimum standards in employment. The Legislature does this kind of thing all the time: everything from establishing a state minimum wage to crafting a state version of family and medical leave. Prohibiting adverse actions under these circumstances will only further elevate these minimum standards to a level that embraces the value this body has historically placed on balancing the rights of employers and employees.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and I would be happy to try to answer any questions you might have.