

Testimony of Susan Lieberman, Co-Chair State Advisory Committee on Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education

LD 1769: An Act Concerning Students Who Experience Educational Disruption due to Temporary or Permanent Changes Where They Live

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Susan Lieberman, and I am co-chair of the State Advisory Committee on Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education (TDAE).

The TDAE Committee fully supports LD 1769: An Act Concerning Students Who Experience Educational Disruption due to Temporary or Permanent Changes Where They Live. In spring 2022, the TDAE Committee presented a report to this legislative committee recommending the Keeping Maine's Children Connected program be re-established so that students who experience a disruption in their education can get re-connected as soon as possible.

Presently, too many students are falling through the cracks. These students experience disruptions in their educational programs due to in-patient psychiatric, foster care, kinship care, and correctional-facility placements and/or high mobility due to frequent moves necessitated by the economic instability of their family. Departments and programs often work in silos. To address this concern, it is our recommendation that a statewide liaison structure be re-established that will create seamless transitions and connections to educational, child welfare, and mental health programs/support for students. We are referencing this as "Keeping Maine's Children Connected" liaisons.

The role of the Keeping Maine's Children Connected liaisons is to link staff who know the youth with staff who can access the resources and services that will support the student and family. Keeping Maine's Children Connected is based on the previous program with the same name that successfully supported students.

In 2004 the Keeping Maine's Children Connected program was established. Within two years, there was a liaison in every regional state agency office, correctional-facility, in-patient psychiatric hospitals, crisis stabilization units and almost every Maine school district. Liaisons were typically administrators, and it became an essential part of their position. Keeping Maine's Children Connected liaisons remained involved in the program because it was an effective and efficient way to support students. The result of the program is that more students have access to the services and learning opportunities they need to be successful.

By recognizing the interconnectedness of the different state and community agencies, Keeping Maine's Youth Connected supports the State's most vulnerable population of students by providing cost effective and coordinated training and resources through a seamless accessible network. One staff person needs to manage the liaison network, provide professional development and opportunities for regional network meetings and collaboration.

When students experience an educational disruption, the student's education is easily knocked off track. Research has shown that it takes 4 to 6 months for students who move around a lot to recover academically from a transfer. (Popp, 2003, Herbers, et.al., 2014)

The most effective transitions occur when there is a comprehensive network of school and community support in place for youth. This program enables staff to access existing resources and support more effectively and efficiently. It promotes communication, transparency, and accountability. Keeping Maine's Children Connected Liaison Network can connect staff with the resources that will benefit youth and families, leading to better learning and health outcomes for students.

For this reason, the State Advisory Committee for Truancy, Dropout, and Alternative Education strongly supports LD 1769: An Act Concerning Students Who Experience Educational Disruption due to Temporary or Permanent Changes Where They Live.

I am happy to further discuss our position or answer any questions.

Thank you for your time today.

Susan Lieberman, co-chair of the State Advisory Committee on Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education