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## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

L.D. 1861

### AN ACT TO REDUCE CHRONIC STUDENT ABSENTEEISM

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Steven Bailey, executive director of Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association, in support of L.D. 1861.

Student absenteeism is already on the radar of school and district staff and administrators. It is of concern, a concern that has increased during and since the months and years of Covid-19. Making connections with students and families to support student attendance is of primary importance to school staff.

Following a model established through the national effort of Count Me In and Attendance Works, L.D. 1861 is designed to develop attendance review teams to address issues related to student attendance by providing programs and services to students who are truant and chronically absent students and their parents or guardians. There are many schools and districts that have such a process in place in Maine, and these have provided great improvement in student attendance and family connections with school. Review teams are structured and scheduled to meet at least monthly to discuss school interventions and community referrals for such students, making any additional recommendations to support the student's school attendance.

Some may say this is already occurring and it is not necessary to legislate this. Assuring this as a statewide effort will engage all schools and districts in this effort to attempt to reduce the percentage of chronically absent students. Last year, 28.4% of Maine students missed more than 17 days of schools. In 2018-2019, 16.8% of students were chronically absent. Schools who develop a team and intervention system to support student attendance have a much better handle on the challenges and work much more efficiently.

MSSA and MSBA encourage you to vote OTP on L.D. 1861.