



Testimony in Support of LD 1129, “An Act to Enact the Curriculum Transparency Act,” **LD 1199**, “An Act to Provide Transparency in Public School Curricula,” **LD 1643**, “An Act Regarding Instructional Materials, Surveys, Analyses, Evaluations and Events at Public Schools,” **and LD 1800**, “An Act Regarding Parental Rights in Education.”

Good afternoon Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Matthew Gagnon, and I am here to testify **in favor of LD 1129, as well as LDs 1199, 1643 and 1800**, and to broadly lend my support to other efforts meant to empower parents in our education system that are being heard here today.

While I serve as the Chief Executive Officer of the Maine Policy Institute, and my organization is strongly in favor of this push for increased transparency in education, I am not only standing before you today as the head of a public policy think tank. Rather I am here to speak as a father of four children, two boys and two girls, ranging in age from five years old to sixteen. Three of my children are currently enrolled in public schools in Yarmouth, and the fourth will be starting kindergarten this fall.

I grew up in Maine and had the benefit of an outstanding education in the Hampden school system. After leaving the state to pursue a career elsewhere, my wife and I returned to Maine in 2014, and at that time we already had a seven-year-old son, with our second child on the way. As we looked around southern Maine for places to live, there was really only one thing on my mind: we wanted to find a community that had a school that would provide an even better education than we received. My wife is a teacher, and we both view our children’s education as our primary responsibility to them as parents.

We ultimately settled in Yarmouth because, at the time, it was the highest-ranking school district in the state. That ranking was based primarily on the standard suite of standardized test scores, the percentage of children taking Advanced Placement classes, and graduation statistics among other things. These are the metrics that most parents use to judge the good and the bad of school performance.

Yet as my children grew older, I began to learn and realize that a well-rounded education is about a lot more than the statistical performance of children on narrowly focused tests. The content of what they learn, and how that material is presented is perhaps even more important than the traditional metrics.

This became abundantly clear to me during the COVID-19 pandemic when my wife and I, like all parents in the state, began to become more involved with our

children's schoolwork than we had typically been before. Suddenly I was listening to and helping to administer lessons, checking work, and listening in on class meetings. I came to learn just how much I did not know about my children's educational life, and some of what I saw and what I heard was quite surprising to me.

I heard and saw overtly political lessons being taught, and inappropriate editorializing by teachers about important issues. I reviewed reading lists for books that were devoid of classical literature in favor of books that offered one-sided perspectives on contemporary cultural debates of great complexity. I saw subtle manipulations of course material consistent with a certain set of values that I simply did not share.

I want to be clear here. I do not object to my children being exposed to a wide variety of material and opinions, including and even especially perspectives that I do not agree with. Neither do I blame teachers in Maine for trying to educate children the best way they know how.

However, the more I learned about what was happening in my school system, the more questions I had and the more upset I became. I want school to open my children's mind to the wondrous language of mathematics, and the awesome power of scientific discovery. I want them to learn civics and citizenship, be exposed to a historical review of this country and the world and gain an appreciation for great works of literature. In short, I want them to learn, so that they may encounter the world armed with a fierce and curious mind, allowing them to become whoever they want to be.

As a parent, these are the things I want for my children. The only way that I can truly know if they are getting it – and indeed the only way I can identify that they are not – is if I am fully involved and knowledgeable about what they are learning. The bills being considered here today are all seeking to aid parents in gaining the information they need in order to make the right decisions for their families.

Without transparency, it becomes impossible for parents to hold educators and administrators accountable for the quality of the education their children are receiving, or judge whether or not the types of lessons they are receiving are promoting the type of education parents want for their child.

In all manner of institutions, transparency aids in making that institution better. Public schools are meant to broadly serve the public at large, and given that it is essential that the public is armed with as much information as possible about what those schools are delivering in the way of education. The bills being considered here today all seek to expand that transparency, and I urge passage immediately. **Please deem LDs 1129, 1199, 1643, and 1800, "Ought to Pass."** Thank you for your time and consideration.