

State of Maine
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Testimony of Richard Colpitts, Director of Education in the Unorganized Territories

In Support of: L.D. 22

An Act to Update the Laws Governing Education in the Unorganized Territory

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Sponsored by: Senator Rafferty

Date: February 5, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Richard Colpitts, and I am here today representing the Department speaking in support of L.D. 22, An Act to Update the Laws Governing Education in the Unorganized Territory. I am currently the Superintendent of Education in the Unorganized Territory (EUT) and have served the Maine education community as a Superintendent for 20 years. I have also served as President of the Maine School Superintendents Association.

This bill amends the laws governing education in the unorganized territory to be comparable to the laws governing public education in organized areas, including eligibility to enroll in education, compulsory attendance, and truancy. These proposed changes are part of an ongoing review of MRS, Title 20-A, Chapter 119 – Education in the Unorganized Territory and the Department of Education’s efforts to ensure that EUT statutes are at parity with rules, expectations, and equity of access with School Administrative Units (SAUs). The current statute was last updated in 1990, and numerous aspects of statute require revision to achieve our goal of parity.

Section 1 addresses student eligibility in the unorganized territory, including minimum ages and exceptions to the eligibility policies. This change brings the EUT policies in line with those of SAUs in Maine.

Section 2 amends the laws governing the transportation of elementary students in the unorganized territory. It removes the provision that prohibits the Commissioner of Education from reimbursing parents for the transportation of a student. Today, the EUT struggles to provide transportation for many of its most remote students. These struggles occur not only because of a bus driver shortage across the State and Nation but also because of inefficiencies of transporting small numbers of students living in remote locations. Access to contracted services is very limited and very costly. Expanding options to include reimbursing parent drivers over approved public roads will help to fill the gap where EUT buses or contracted services are unavailable and ensures the equity of access for these most remote students. To be clear, the EUT would rely on

the option to contract with parents only in the event that we are unable to provide transportation through other routes.

Sections 3 and 4 modify exceptions for attendance at school to align with those of SAUs in Maine.

You may remember seeing me last year, during the 131st Legislature, in support of LD 2042, An Act to Update the Laws Governing Education in the Unorganized Territory. The initial version of the fiscal note for that bill noted that “as General Fund expenditures from this program are fully reimbursed by the Unorganized Territory Education and Services Fund, there will be a corresponding increase in the tax collected through the Unorganized Territory Education and Services Tax” and “the additional tax revenue will reimburse the General Fund for expenditures incurred from this bill.” However, I want to be clear, the EUT is able to cover these costs in full using existing resources, therefore there is no need for a General Fund appropriation and there will be no impact to the Unorganized Territory Education and Services Tax.

For these reasons, the Department of Education is in support of L.D. 22, An Act to Update the Laws Governing Education in the Unorganized Territory. I am happy to answer any questions, and I will be available for work sessions on this bill.