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President of the Senate

THE MAINE SENATE
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Testimony in Support of
LD 396, An Act to Provide for a Later Starting Time for High Schools
Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
February 27, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Mattie Daughtry. I serve as President of the Maine Senate and proudly represent Senate District 23, including Brunswick, Freeport, Harpswell, Pownal, Chebeague Island, and part of Yarmouth. I am honored to sponsor LD 396, "An Act to Provide for a Later Starting Time for High Schools," a bill that seeks to align our school schedules with the well-being and success of Maine's students.

This is not the first time I have introduced this bill. Over the years, I have returned to this committee with the same message: starting high school later is not just a matter of convenience—it is a public health necessity. The science is clear, the benefits are proven, and the urgency has only grown stronger.

I am not alone in advocating for this change. A 2006 study from the National Sleep Foundation found that 87% of high school students were getting less than the recommended 8.5 to 9.5 hours of sleep. In 2014, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released a policy statement, *School Start Times for Adolescents*, recommending that high schools start no earlier than 8:30 a.m., calling chronic sleep loss in teens "one of the most common—and easily fixable—public health issues in the U.S. today."

Sleep deprivation in teens has real and serious consequences. Research has shown that sleep-deprived teens:

- Experience lower academic performance, with tiredness correlating to declining grades.
- Have a higher risk of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts.
- Are at an increased risk for obesity, diabetes, and substance abuse.
- Engage in more high-risk behaviors, including reckless driving.
- Face a greater likelihood of being involved in car accidents due to drowsy driving.

This last point is personal to me. While I was in high school, two of my classmates passed away from crashes on their way to school. The impact of sleep deprivation has real and tragic consequences, and we have the opportunity to make a difference by addressing a contributing factor to drowsy driving among teens.

In fact, research has demonstrated that waking a teenager at 6:30 a.m. for a 7:30 a.m. school start time is equivalent to waking an adult at 3:00 a.m. A study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that in schools where classes began at 7:30 a.m., only 34% of students got

at least 8 hours of sleep. In contrast, in schools where classes started at 8:30 a.m. or later, 66% of students got the recommended amount of sleep.

This bill proposes a simple but effective change: ensuring that, starting with the 2026–2027 school year, Maine’s high schools start no earlier than 8:30 a.m. It is a necessary step forward in addressing an issue that is both widespread and solvable.

I understand there may be concerns about logistics—especially transportation and extracurricular schedules. However, other states and school districts have successfully made this shift. Since I first introduced this bill years ago, multiple states have moved forward with later start times. In 2019, California became the first state to pass a statewide mandate requiring most high schools to start no earlier than 8:30 a.m. Florida recently passed a similar law set to take effect in 2026. Here in Maine, districts such as Portland, South Portland, Biddeford, Saco, Old Orchard Beach, and RSU 1 (Bath area) have already implemented or are considering later start times, proving that this transition is both feasible and beneficial.

Logistical concerns can be mitigated by:

- Reconfiguring bus routes to maintain efficiency while adjusting to new schedules.
- Staggering start times between elementary, middle, and high schools.
- Allowing student-athletes to take free periods at the end of the school day so they can leave early for practices and games.

This bill does not impose an untested or theoretical change—it builds on successful efforts across the country and within our own state. The Brookings Institution estimated that moving school start times one hour later would result in approximately \$17,500 in increased future earnings per student, due to improved academic performance and well-being.

Maine has an opportunity to take an important step in improving student well-being, academic success, and public safety by adopting this proven policy. I respectfully urge my colleagues to support this bill and take a meaningful step toward ensuring Maine’s students can learn in an environment that prioritizes their health and success.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

President of the Senate, Senate District 23
Brunswick, Freeport, Harpswell, Pownal, Chebeague Island, and part of Yarmouth