

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 396

AN ACT TO PROVIDE FOR A LATER STARTING TIME FOR HIGH SCHOOLS

February 27, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Robbie Feinberg, director of communications and government relations for Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association in opposition to L.D. 396, "An Act to Provide for a Later Starting Time for High Schools."

While the intent of L.D. 396—to improve student well-being by mandating a later school start time—is well-meaning, this bill raises significant concerns that merit careful consideration. L.D. 396 fails to account for the diverse demographics across our state, and it undermines the jurisdiction of local school boards in determining what is best for their communities.

Proponents of later start times often cite studies suggesting potential benefits regarding student sleep and well-being. L.D. 396, if passed, will address half of the issue, as we can't control when students actually go to bed. Plus, given the complexity of student learning and the many factors affecting high schoolers at home and outside of the classroom, we feel it's premature to impose a statewide mandate without clear evidence of its effectiveness for every Maine community.

Maine's school districts vary significantly in their demographics, geography, and transportation logistics. Rural districts face unique challenges, such as long bus routes and limited transportation resources. Many districts' current school start times are spread out enough so that districts can reuse the same buses and bus drivers for their elementary, middle and high schools. A mandated later school start could shrink the time between those runs and upend that system. A later school day also impacts extracurriculars, internships, and after-school jobs, potentially limiting those opportunities or forcing students to work later into the night.

Changing a school's start time affects nearly every part of our schools and communities: buses, sports, jobs, childcare, and more. With so much at stake, these policies need to be guided by those who understand the specific needs of their districts – local school boards and administrators. School boards survey residents and talk to educators, students and local families and businesses. They listen to potential concerns and work together to address them. On this particular issue, we have seen local officials act with care, thoughtfully considering all of the factors at play to determine if a policy change is truly in the best interest of their community. This has worked well. Locally elected school board officials are in the best position to evaluate and implement policies that reflect the priorities of their communities.

The one-size-fits-all approach outlined in this bill does not consider these diverse local needs. Even other states that have passed similar bills have recognized these unique local situations. When California became

the first state to pass a later school start time law in 2019, it specifically exempted rural school districts from the mandate, recognizing their unique local challenges. Maine is still considered one of the most rural states in the country, and our schools need local flexibility.

These changes can also cost money. Some districts have to run more buses when they move to a later school start time. Some school board members have also voiced concerns that a later school start time for extracurriculars could mean later sports practices, forcing them to add lighting to sports fields. These costs are not considered nor covered in this bill.

By mandating a later start time statewide, L.D. 396 removes critical decision-making power from school boards and administrators who are directly accountable to students, parents, and community members. Local governance is a cornerstone of effective education policy, and this bill undermines that principle.

For these reasons, I urge the Committee to reject L.D. 396. Thank you for your time and consideration.