

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Carney, Chairwoman Kuhn and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Michelle Tucker. I live in Gardiner, where I am a School Board Director for MSAD 11. I am finishing a bachelor's degree in social and behavioral sciences at USM. I am testifying in favor of LD 492.

There is a day from my daughter's childhood I will never forget. She was about eight years old, and she flew off the bus faster than I had ever seen. The moment that she saw me, she began crying. As I hugged her, those tears turned to sobs, and she did not want to let me go.

I am, and always will be, my daughter's safe place – no matter how old she gets. There is a sacred bond between a parent and a child.

That day she learned, firsthand, that some adults are not safe. A substitute teacher had an inappropriate conversation on her cell phone within earshot of my daughter's class and then asked the class to keep what they heard a secret from their parents. That substitute teacher rightfully lost her job.

It is never appropriate for any adult, but especially adults in stated positions of authority, to promote keeping secrets from parents, for any reason.

And yet, in the short time I've been serving in MSAD 11, that is exactly what I have seen. The chairwoman has said multiple times that parents don't make decisions, and they don't have the right to know certain things. A fellow school board director made waves over the past couple of weeks with her outrageous and slanderous statements about parents who do not align with her political beliefs. Several FOIA requests revealed emails where trusted adults in the district – including a principal, a nurse, and the superintendent, colluded to keep secrets from parents.

This pattern of behavior is not specific to MSAD 11. It is endemic throughout the state of Maine. The principal of a school right here in Augusta

said she'd like to build dorms to keep students from Sunday to Thursday, insinuating that she could "let" the parents have their children on weekends.

Where does this end? I encourage anyone listening to my testimony today to dive into your school boards. Leverage the FOIA law to learn what is happening behind closed doors.

Parents are the ones who know their children the best. Absent of any issues of abuse or neglect, it is not only a parent's right to be involved in every aspect of their children's lives – it is their sacred duty. Our children are entrusted to us to love, to nurture, to raise, to teach and to help them become the wonderful people God intends for them to be. It is not up to parents to follow the lead of the state or the school – it is the job of the school and the state to follow our leadership on how we wish to raise our families and live our lives with the freedoms God intended each of us to have.

Please vote "Ought to pass" on this important amendment to remove undue interference in our family's lives.

Thank you,

Michelle Tucker

Gardiner, Maine