

Testimony of Thomas Keller, Member of the Maine State Board of Education and Chair of the Certification and Higher Education Committee against LD 369 – An Act to Grant or Extend Conditional Teaching Certificates Under Certain Circumstances

February 28, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Dr. Tom Keller and I am a member of the Maine State Board of Education, I chair its Certification and Higher Education Committee and I am here today representing the State Board. I am testifying against LD 369 – An Act to Grant or Extend Conditional Teaching Certificates Under Certain Circumstances.

Pursuant to Section 401 of Title 20-A, the State Board of Education is *"intended to act as a body with certain policy-making, administrative and advisory functions. In those capacities, the board has the primary responsibility for the following:*

- 1. Formulating policy. Formulating policy by which the commissioner shall administer certain regulatory tasks;*
- 2. Advising commissioner. Advising the commissioner in the administration of all the mandated responsibilities of that position; and*
- 3. Enforcing regulatory requirements. Enforcing regulatory requirements for school administrative units.*

*The state board may advise the commissioner and the Legislature on matters concerning state laws relating to public preschool to grade 12 and postsecondary education."*

Serving in that capacity the State Board of Education finds itself against LD 369, An Act to Grant or Extend Conditional Teaching Certificates Under Certain Circumstances for several reasons:

1. The State Board is currently engaged in a massive undertaking amending Chapter 115: The Credentialing of Education Personnel. We have held a series of regional Conversations on feedback regarding Chapter 115 and the committee I chair has been gathering input as well for many months. At no time has anyone identified granting or extending conditional teaching certificates under certain circumstances as a widespread problem.
2. In Section 1., 3-A. Fees, the proposal states that the Commissioner of Public Safety may not assess a fee for fingerprinting an applicant for a conditional certificate. Does this mean the applicant need not undergo a Criminal History Records Check (CHRC), or that they just not pay for that? If they don't pay for it, who does? Every educator in the state has undergone a CHRC and most have paid for it as a necessary professional fee.
3. While we recognize that there are public health emergencies, illness of the individual or an inability of the individual to teach for an extended period, we believe that the current three year period of a conditional certificate is adequate. We wish that every student in Maine has a fully certified teacher in the class with them and allowing extensions delays having someone fully certified in all classrooms.
4. Regarding the addition of a conditional certificate for an individual who has been employed as a full-time professor at a college or university in the State for at least 5 years, that is already allowable assuming the professor has at least a Bachelor's degree.

For these reasons, we are against the passage of LD 369 – An Act to Grant or Extend Conditional Teaching Certificates Under Certain Circumstances and hope you will vote it ought not to pass.

I am happy to address any questions you have.

Thank you.