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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

L.D. 696

AN ACT TO BOLSTER THE MAINE TEACHER RESIDENCY PROGRAM

March 11, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am Robbie Feinberg, the 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 the Maine School Superintendents Association in support of L.D. 696. Our associations represent more than 1,700 school board members across our state, along with more than 200 superintendents and their districts.

Maine school leaders understand the urgent need to address the shortage of teachers within our state, and to do whatever possible to get more qualified educators into our classrooms. The Maine Teacher Residency Program has a proven track record of success in achieving these goals, and we urge you to support this bill to bolster the program.

We know a key part of the effort to recruit and retain educators is to provide them with support during their first few years on the job. These years can be exhausting for a teacher, with a steep learning curve, and support and mentoring are crucial. While local districts already offer peer support programs, the Maine Teacher Residency Program is filling crucial gaps by providing education, experience, support and financial assistance to new educators, allowing them to focus on attaining certification and preparing for this fulfilling career.

We appreciate that these teacher residencies are tailored to different needs, depending on the district and candidate. These students have filled important roles as teachers, subs, and ed techs. Some districts have students co-teaching with experienced educators. In others, they work as ed techs with opportunities to plan lessons and lead teach. Conditionally and emergency certified teachers also receive support. These residencies allow for new educators to develop valuable relationships, mentorship, and on-the-job experience, making it more likely they will keep teaching within their school and the education field as a whole.

As one administrator put it: "we were able to train them, then they're here – their first year of teaching is now a breeze because they've already done that. They've done it with all the support to be successful."

Our members are particularly encouraged that the Teacher Residency Program is not only operating in a few districts but is truly making a difference throughout our state. Teacher residents have worked in dozens of districts -- in Biddeford, Old Town, Fort Kent, Bucksport and even further. This program is assisting schools throughout our state at a critical time for the education workforce.

We know that this program is not the only solution to Maine's shortage of educators. School districts are boosting pay in collective bargaining agreements, and administrators also hope that potential changes to Maine's certification rules will provide new avenues for prospective educators to enter the field. We view the Maine Teacher Residency Program as a proven, successful complement to these other efforts, and we hope you support it moving forward.