

Good morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. I am Norman Higgins, a former three term State Representative from Dover-Foxcroft. As Chair of the Maine Charter School Commission, I am in support of LD 282, An Act to Raise the Limit on the Total Number of Public Charter Schools.

Currently by statute, the Charter School Commission has the authority to authorize ten public charter schools. In 2022, the Commission did not reauthorize Harpswell Academy. In 2024 the Commission instituted a process to replace the vacancy with a new school. The informational phase included conversations with higher educational leaders in Maine, major institutions and other interested parties. The Commission received six Letters of Interest and in February of 2025 two formal applications. The applicants are for a New Americans Public Charter School for Portland and Lewiston and the Wabanaki Hybrid School from Maine Indian Education. Lana Ewing, Executive Director of the Maine Charter School Commission will share with you the rigorous process for establishing a new school.

The review process led by Brian Langley, former State Senator and Chair of this Committee and Leigh Wisenburger Albert, Director of Admissions at Bates College will make their recommendation for a new school, if they meet the criteria, to the Commission on April 8<sup>th</sup>. In addition, they will determine if both the applicants meet the criteria for authorization as a Maine Public Charter school.

LD 282 would provide the Charter School Commission with the authority to approve both applications if recommended by the review process. I would encourage the Committee to delay the Work Session until after a determination is made on the two current applicants to determine if a need to increase the number of authorized schools is warranted.

I will be present at the Work Session and look forward to working with the Committee on this proposed legislation.