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Testimony In Support of

LD 220 An Act to Establish the Hope and Inclusion Scholarship Program in Order to Provide Funding for Students Attending Certain Private Schools and Students Receiving Home Instruction

Senator Rafferty, Representatives Murphy, Lyman and esteemed colleagues on the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs -

My name is Barbara Bagshaw and I proudly represent my neighbors in Windham. I stand before you to present my bill, **LD 220 An Act to Establish the Hope and Inclusion Scholarship Program in Order to Provide Funding for Students Attending Certain Private Schools and Students Receiving Home Instruction**

Families who apply for and receive a Hope and Inclusion Scholarship – also known as an education savings account (ESA) – will be empowered to direct the state portion of their kids’ education funding to build a learning experience that best fits their individual needs.

Among many parents, there is a feeling that they have less and less of a voice in public education and see their rights as guardians being eroded. I have heard from more than one of my constituents that “this is taxation without representation.” They are forced to fund an education system which is not working for their kids’ needs.

We all want to do what's best for our kids. It's time that we trust families with the power to decide for their children. They deserve to have hope for their kids' future.

Education should bring hope and include every student equally. It is my hope that LD 220 can do just that.

Seventeen states across the nation have seen their educational savings accounts programs grow in popularity in recent years. This is because they work for the families who choose them. Even still, on average less than 5% of eligible students in ESA states opt for one. ESAs simply provide more options for the kids who need them.

While resident district schools may work for the vast majority of students, one size simply does not fit all. Some kids need some extra attention. Unlike traditional vouchers or town-tuitioning, ESAs empower families to work with educators to curate a learning experience for each child. For instance, a family can purchase curriculum materials, book part-time programming at a local learning center, take gymnastics lessons, even take a class or two at their local public school, all with their ESA funds. ESAs ensure that those closest to a child are making the decisions about their education.

Families with an ESA will have access to an account for each of their eligible students in their home. New Hampshire, West Virginia, Indiana, Arizona, Florida, North Carolina, and Tennessee have active educational savings accounts programs with success.

How to qualify for a hope and inclusion scholarship:

- Students must be under 21
- They must live in Maine
- The student has not completed a secondary education

More freedom benefits everyone. Nobody loses freedom because someone else voluntarily applied for a school choice program.

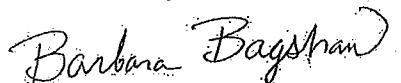
This bill trusts families to build a unique education for their kids' needs, making it more helpful to homeschooling families than previous choice bills, if they choose to use the program.

It offers families the power to curate a real alternative to traditional schooling with Hope funds if they choose to, not only with state-approved schools.

Still, any family that wants to homeschool as they do today, without the use of a Hope Scholarship will retain all of their freedom to do so. The program is voluntary, and the bill does not change Maine homeschooling laws.

Please vote LD 220 Ought to Pass and help deliver more educational options to the Maine families who desperately need them. Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

Yours truly,



Barbara Bagshaw
State Representative