

Maine Education Association

Jesse Hargrove President | Beth French Vice President | Jaye Rich Treasurer
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

Testimony

In Opposition To

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

Jan Kosinski, Government Relations Director, Maine Education Association

Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

March 12, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and other members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Jan Kosinski, and I am the Director of Government Relations for the Maine Education Association (MEA). The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators, including teachers and other educators in nearly every public school in the state, as well as full-time faculty and other professional and support staff in both the University of Maine and Community College systems. Thousands of retired educators continue their connection and advocacy work through the MEA- Retired program.

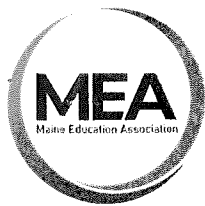
I offer this testimony today on behalf of the MEA in OPPOSITION to LD 220, *An Act to Establish the Hope and Inclusion Scholarship Program in Order to Provide Funding for Students Attending Certain Private Schools and Students Receiving Home Instruction*.

This bill appears to be based on model legislation provided by the American Legislative Exchange Council, or ALEC, a nonprofit organization funded largely by corporations and certain foundations.¹ While ALEC charges dues to members, including legislators, a simple search will show that the Council receives millions of dollars from large corporations such as ExxonMobil and funders such as the Koch Foundation.² In prior legislative sessions, such bills were often referred to as “voucher bills” and while the terminology may have changed, the result is the same. Voucher bills such as this one will drain public dollars from public schools, and siphon that money to certain families, especially families with the means to take advantage of what is being offered. While well-intentioned, these scholarships pose significant risks to the integrity of our public education system and may contribute to a deeper divide in educational opportunities across our great state.

The bill proposes to allow students and their families to establish an account and allows both the state AND local contribution to follow that student. The state and local funding, instead of going to support the local public school, can be used for a whole array of educational experiences, including paying tuition at a private school, textbooks, tutoring services, uniforms, as well as “basic supplies.”

¹ You can find the model legislation from the American Legislative Exchange Council here: [The Hope Scholarship Act - American Legislative Exchange Council - American Legislative Exchange Council](#)

² You can read more about the American Legislative Exchange Council here: [What is ALEC - ALEC Exposed](#)



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As you are aware, private schools can reject students based on academic performance, behavioral records, or other factors. Public schools, by contrast, are legally required to serve all students. If some students in a community take advantage of the voucher program called for in this bill, others not accepted into the private school may find their local school with fewer resources and thus fewer opportunities. Directing public funds towards private institutions diverts much-needed resources away from local public schools, which are already underfunded and strained. Most children in Maine attend public schools, yet this bill proposes to siphon away critical funding that schools need and rely on.

We are also deeply concerned about the lack of oversight of the voucher programs called for in this bill. We are worried some may use the funding to invest in programs that are contrary to the needs of the students including textbooks or other supplemental materials which may have questionable educational value or may not reflect current reality.

Our concerns about such vouchers are not theoretical – instead, our opposition is based on the experiences of other states.

For example, the state of Arizona was an early adopter of a similar voucher program when it passed such a bill in 2022. Over 40,00 students signed up for the program, which provides about \$7,000 per student each year. But in 2023, a review of the program showed some parents used the funding to pay for “kayaks and trampolines, cowboy roping lessons and tickets to entertainment venues like SeaWorld.”³

In addition, research from other states show that once vouchers were introduced, they were utilized to pay private school tuition for the most affluent families. Again, in Arizona, 80% of the applicants for the voucher program were not enrolled in public school, “meaning these students are already attending private schools, being home schooled, or just entering schooling.”⁴ In Ohio, a 2023 study demonstrated 55% of those accessing vouchers already attended a private school.⁵ The author of a study prepared for the Ohio Education Policy Institute concluded:

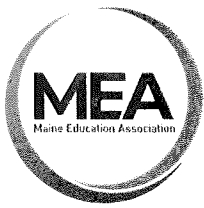
"Once you start giving vouchers to people that are already attending private schools," Fleeter said, "you're not enhancing opportunities when you do that. You're just paying for people that have already demonstrated that they have the ability to make that choice themselves."⁶

³ Please see, **Arizona Parents are Using Public Ed \$ for Kayaks, Trampolines & SeaWorld Tickets**, Linda Jacobson, February 7, 2023, found here: [Arizona Parents are Using Public Ed \\$ for Kayaks, Trampolines & SeaWorld Tickets](#)

⁴ Please see, **Nearly Half of Universal Voucher Applicants from Wealthier Communities as Total State Private School Subsidies Reaches \$600 Million**, Grand Canyon Institute, November 6, 2022, found here: [Nearly Half of Universal Voucher Applicants from Wealthier Communities as Total State Private School Subsidies Reaches \\$600 Million - Grand Canyon Institute](#)

⁵ Please see, **School vouchers now going to more wealthy, private school students, study says**, Ideastream Public Media, June 5, 2023, found here: [Study: Vouchers going to more wealthy, private-school students | Ideastream Public Media](#)

⁶ *Ibid*



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This experience is shared by the state of Iowa, where a recently enacted voucher bill also shows that “[t]wo-thirds of students who received a private school voucher in Iowa this year were already enrolled in a private school.”⁷

If Maine were to ever enact a voucher law, such as the one called for in LD 220, we would predict we would see a similar result. Namely, we would see affluent families use these vouchers to attend private schools.

Using the data from the Maine Education Policy Research Institute prepared for this Committee just a few weeks ago, we can deduce that the vouchers outlined in this proposal would set aside approximately \$15,000 per year of state and local funding that would have otherwise been directed to the local public school for each student. To arrive at this calculation, I used the state and local contributions for public schools (\$2.6 billion) per year and divided that figure by 173,000 – the approximate number of students enrolled in pre-k-12 public schools. However, many private schools in Maine have tuition payments far above \$15,000. For example, Waynflete in Portland charges \$41,260 per year for students in Grades 6-11 thus leaving families to find an additional \$26,000 per year to cover the basic tuition. It is important to note, this figure does not include transportation costs, which may increase the costs for parents.⁸ Waynflete is not an outlier. According to Private School Review, a website, the tuition costs for day students at Gould Academy in Bethel run \$54,848 per year, while Kents Hill School has a day rate of over \$35,000 per year.⁹ I could go on, but given this information and the experience of other states, we can expect much of the funding for the vouchers/scholarships contained in this bill will be used to pay the tuition costs of Maine’s students who are already attending private schools or who are lucky enough to live in homes where the parents can afford \$20,000 or more per year. The vouchers will help these families but leave the rest of Maine’s children in public schools that are woefully under-resourced.

For these reasons, and others, we are opposed to LD 220, and we encourage the Committee to vote “ought not to pass” on this bill.

Thank you for your attention and your service to the people of Maine. I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.

⁷ Please see, **Report: Majority of Iowa’s voucher recipients already went to private school**, Iowa Starting Line, January 29, 2024, found here: [Report: Majority of Iowa’s voucher recipients already went to private school](#)

⁸ Please see [Tuition and Tuition Assistance - Waynflete School](#)

⁹ Please see [Maine Private High Schools By Tuition Cost \(2024-25\)](#)