



## **Maine Education Association**

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### **Testimony In Support of LD 165, An Act to Modify Discipline Policies in Maine's Public Schools March 13, 2025**

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

My name is Jesse Hargrove, I am a high school social studies teacher, on leave to serve as Maine Education Association President. 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 SUPPORT of LD 165, An Act to Modify Discipline Policies in Maine's Public Schools, as amended.

As a parent, past school board director, and educator, this bill has been cognitively and emotionally challenging. Any time my students spend out of school is a challenge, whether it is for family vacation, illness, or suspension. Regardless of school policies allowing or disallowing make-up, I, most of my colleagues, have students at heart, wanting them to learn and will do the remediation. That often means additional time and interventions, often outside of school hours. We want to minimize the use of student suspensions, and we look forward to a time of fully staffed, fully trained schools, with involved families that have the resources to support every student, to avoid the use of suspension and expulsion of students for any reason.

We are aware of the research demonstrating the ineffectiveness of punitive behavior measures, and system inequities in application. We want students in school. However, under current circumstances, time to reflect and de-escalate, to revise plans, to reorganize staff, and to retool, may be the best our communities can offer school administrators and staff to better support students in need, while ensuring continuity of programming for other students. That said, we want students who are out of school, back as soon as possible, with their peers, and engaged in learning activities.

We appreciate the willingness of the sponsor, Representative Will Tuell to find a better solution than the original proposal. We also appreciate the responsiveness of the other partners in education, specifically the Maine School Management Association, Maine School Principal's Association, and the Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities (MADSEC) to work together on this proposal. Together, we agreed to include the language requiring administrators to make every effort to get students back into school as quickly as possible.

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To further emphasize the power of this collaboration, we have worked with MSMA, MPA, MSSA, and MADSEC to develop unified guidance providing clarity to educators on the Dangerous Behavior Prevention and Intervention Law – a law intended to address behaviors that present a risk of harm to students or others. A major function of this law involves developing individualized response plans for students that support safer behaviors. The statute itself calls for the plans to minimize the use of suspensions and expulsions, while focusing on more positive behavioral interventions and more appropriate supports for the student. We believe that this law, when implemented with fidelity, is a much more impactful way to address the root cause of behaviors, utilizing the school's resources and professionals to meet the student's needs, but we acknowledge there are scenarios where a staff and resource reset are necessary.

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.