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Testimony of Representative Michael Brennan presenting

LD 628, An Act Regarding Eligibility to Apply for a Department of Education Diploma

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy and fellow distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Michael Brennan, and I represent House District 115, which includes a portion of Portland.

Today, I am here to introduce **LD 628, An Act Regarding Eligibility to Apply for a Department of Education Diploma**.

This bill allows for a student to apply for a Department of Education diploma if they are a 4th year secondary student and is unable to satisfy the requirements for a diploma from a school administrative unit because of a significant interruption to the student's education. LD 628 removes the sunset COVID-19 provision and adds language allowing for exceptions and special circumstances, which you can see in the draft bill language attached to this testimony.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been witnesses to the lasting and long-term consequences on students' educational progress. This bill recognizes these consequences and provides a student the latitude and flexibility to complete their high school education via a different, perhaps more attainable route to them.

Everyone in this room agrees that graduating from high school is a critically important milestone for every student. I believe it is incumbent upon us to take every reasonable step to facilitate the attainment of that goal.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 20-A MRSA §257-A, sub-§1-A is amended to read:

(TEXT EFFECTIVE UNTIL 9/01/26) (TEXT REPEALED 9/01/26) Eligibility for students impacted by COVID-19 pandemic. Notwithstanding the eligibility requirements in subsection 1, a student is eligible to apply for a Department of Education diploma if that student is a 4th year secondary school student and is unable to satisfy the requirements for a diploma from a school administrative unit because the student experienced a significant interruption to the student's education as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and civil emergency during the student's secondary school education history.

This subsection is repealed on September 1, 2026.

Sec. 1. 20-A MRSA §257-A, sub-§1-C is enacted to read:

1-C. Exception for significant interruption to student's education conditions. A student is eligible to apply for a Department of Education diploma if that student is at least a 4th year secondary school student and is unable to satisfy the requirements for a diploma from a school administrative unit because of a disruption significant interruption to the student's education conditions as approved by the commissioner during the student's secondary school education history. Disruption to the educational conditions may include those situations as outlined in Title 20-A §5161, sub-§2-A1

Sec. 1. 20-A MRSA §5161, sub-§1-A- is amended to read:

2-A. Definitions. Education disruption. "Education disruption" means disruption of the educational program of an elementary or secondary school student as a result of:

- A. Homelessness, ~~or foster care placement, or other housing disruption;~~
- ~~B. Absence for 10 or more consecutive school days due to placement in an interim program~~
- B. Absent for more than 10% of school days in a year due to unforeseen circumstances that may include placement in an interim program, unplanned hospitalization, or serious medical condition.
- C. Enrollment in 3 2 or more schools or educational programs ~~in a single~~ during secondary school; or
- D. The student's being an immigrant student or a migrant student.

"Education disruption" does not include an absence for 10 or more consecutive school days as a result of a planned absence for a reason such as a family event or a medical absence for a planned hospitalization or recovery or pursuant to a superintendent's determination developed in accordance with section 5205, subsection 2.