

Maine Curriculum Leaders Association

Championing Policies And Practices That Enhance Teaching And Learning

Nicole Chan, Ellsworth Community School District, President

Jon Doty, RSU #34, President-Elect

Jennifer Nickerson, MSAD 22, Treasurer

Joanne Dowd, Kittery School District, Secretary

Debra McIntyre, Executive Director

Testimony of Debra McIntyre, Executive Director, on behalf of the members of the Maine Curriculum Leaders Association, testifying Neither For Nor Against on LD 322 An Act to Promote Student Attendance in Schools by Requiring the Commissioner of Education to Implement School Attendance Best Practices.

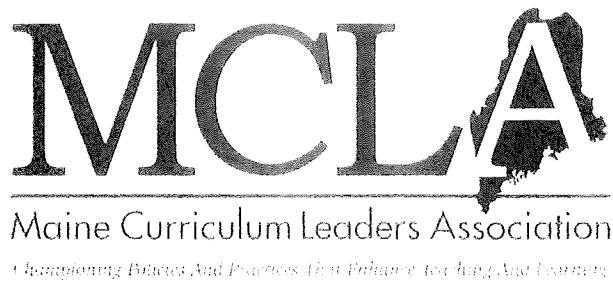
Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Debra McIntyre, and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Curriculum Leaders Association. On behalf of the members of MCLA, I am testifying Neither For Nor Against on LD 322 An Act to Promote Student Attendance in Schools by Requiring the Commissioner of Education to Implement School Attendance Best Practices.

I am here today on behalf of the Maine Curriculum Leaders Association (MCLA), and we would like to express our views regarding the importance of school attendance and the role that truancy still plays in addressing absenteeism. While we understand and support the intent behind LD 322—to promote student attendance and improve school outcomes—MCLA believes it is crucial to emphasize that truancy should remain a tool in the toolbox for addressing absenteeism.

Truancy is often used as only a last resort, but it continues to be a necessary option for school districts, particularly in cases where other methods to address chronic absenteeism may not be sufficient. It is essential that districts retain the ability to use truancy as an intervention for students whose attendance issues persist despite the use of other, more proactive strategies.

Absenteeism is a complex issue, and the response must be equally nuanced. We recognize that school districts already make use of many best practices, such as those outlined in the *Attendance Works* program and the *Attendance Toolkit* from the Maine Department of Education (MDOE). These resources have been invaluable in helping districts build systems to prevent and reduce absenteeism, utilizing these strategies in the multi-tiered system of support. However, there are cases where additional steps, including truancy proceedings, are necessary.

MCLA also stresses that each school district in Maine is unique, with different challenges and resources. What works in one district may not work in another, and local leaders must have the



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flexibility to choose the most effective tools for their particular circumstances. Mandating a one-size-fits-all approach, or limiting options such as truancy, could create unintended consequences by preventing districts from taking action.

We urge the committee to consider that truancy procedures, when applied thoughtfully and as part of a broader strategy of support, are an essential part of an effective response to absenteeism. School leaders need the flexibility to address issues based on the specific needs and context of their students and communities.

In conclusion, MCLA supports the goals of LD 322, particularly those that focus on best practices for improving student attendance. However, we respectfully request that the bill not restrict the ability of school districts to utilize truancy as a tool when necessary. Chronic absenteeism is a serious issue that requires a comprehensive, flexible approach, and we believe that keeping truancy as one of the options in the toolbox is crucial for addressing this ongoing problem.

Thank you for your time and consideration.