

State of Maine
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Testimony of Courtney Belolan, Director of Policy and Government Affairs

In Support of: L.D. 86

An Act to Update the Laws Regarding Education

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Sponsored by: Representative Sargent

Date: April 1, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Courtney Belolan, and I am here today representing the Department of Education speaking in support of LD 86, An Act to Update the Laws Regarding Education which proposes to amend statute to provide alignment with Federal policy and clarity on previously enacted financial statutes.

The Department seeks two changes to align our practice with Federal policy. First, we ask that the statutory definition of homeless student be updated to match the federal definition by removing the inclusion of students awaiting foster placement. This change will align the language of the Maine Department of Education with the nationally recognized language.

Second, we propose an update to statute regarding private schools' receipt of public funds for tuition purposes. This change reflects the United States Supreme Court's 2022 Carson v. Makin decision by removing nonsectarian from the eligibility requirements.

We also propose an update to the statutes relating to community school districts to allow for reorganization without the need for a private and special law. Currently, a community school district is the only type of school that needs a private or special law to reorganize.

For clarity on financial statutes, the Department notes updating audit report statutes for education service centers and school administrative units to reduce duplicative audit submissions. We also request that Title 20-A, Chapter 608 be repealed. This chapter has been replaced by various sections of Title 20-A, Chapter 606-B, the Essential Programs and Services Funding Act. The calculations as written in the remaining section of Chapter 608 are provided for in Chapter 606-B. Maintaining the redundant statute has caused confusion as people seek understanding to make important decisions about school finance.

For these reasons, the Department of Education is in support of L.D. 86, An Act to Update the Laws Regarding Education that was developed in order to provide clarity to our statutes. I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have and can be available for work sessions on this bill.