



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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April 15, 2025

Testimony
In Support of

LD 1395 An Act Regarding Human Trafficking Prevention Instruction and Dissemination of and Access to Obscene Material in Schools

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and the distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee: Thank you for considering LD 1395, “*An Act Regarding Human Trafficking Prevention Instruction and Dissemination of and Access to Obscene Material in Schools.*” This bill is a vital step to protect Maine’s children from obscene content and the growing threat of human trafficking, fostering safety, empowerment, and resilience in our schools and libraries.

Maine’s children face unprecedented challenges in today’s digital age. Unfiltered online platforms, often accessed through educational vendors, can expose students to sexually explicit or exploitative material—content no child should encounter under the guise of learning. At the same time, sex trafficking is a stark reality in our state. A 2015 study by Hornby Zeller Associates estimated 200–300 trafficking cases annually in Maine, with a significant portion involving minors. In just 2023 alone, the National Human Trafficking Hotline identified 26 cases in Maine, 19 of which were sex trafficking, involving 64 victims—many of them young girls exploited in our communities. These numbers likely underrepresent the true scope, as trafficking thrives in secrecy.

Local cases hit close to home. In 2025, a Rockland massage parlor was exposed as a front for an interstate sex trafficking ring, with a Gardiner man arrested for orchestrating it through fraud and coercion. In 2023, a Bangor man was sentenced to 18 years for trafficking a minor across state lines, preying on a child’s vulnerability. A 2012 Preble Street study found that 24% of homeless and street-involved youth in Maine had been offered drugs for sex, and 26% were asked to engage in commercial sex acts. These are our students—in our classrooms, cafeterias, gymnasiums, and communities—children who, without education and awareness, may not recognize the red flags of grooming or coercion until it’s too late. The 2023 Shared Hope International Report Card on Child & Youth Sex Trafficking gave Maine a “C” grade, highlighting critical gaps in training for school personnel and the lack of prevention education in schools, underscoring the urgent need for action.

LD 1395 addresses these challenges with clarity and purpose. It ensures that digital library resources used in Maine’s schools block obscene material, as defined by Title 17, §2911, as well as child pornography and depictions of sexual exploitation under Title 17-A, §282. By holding vendors accountable, we align fiscal responsibility with child safety, ensuring public funds support platforms that protect, not endanger, our students. This approach creates boundaries that preserve innocence while fostering a safe learning environment, without limiting access to knowledge.

District 37 Frankfort, Prospect, Searsport, Stockton Springs, Winterport

The bill also eliminates Maine’s outdated “educational exemption” under Title 17, §2911(2)(A), which allows obscene material in schools if deemed for “purely educational purposes.” Closing this loophole ensures that content legally defined as obscene has no place in our classrooms or libraries, reflecting common-sense standards that protect students while respecting the integrity of education.

Beyond safeguarding against harmful content, LD 1395 empowers schools to provide age-appropriate human trafficking prevention education. This equips students with the tools to recognize grooming, spot warning signs, and report concerns safely. It also offers staff training to identify at-risk youth—those facing poverty, housing instability, or other vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit. Since 2014, Preble Street has served over 200 trafficking survivors, 90% of whom lacked stable housing. This education isn’t just knowledge; it’s a shield against exploitation, helping children navigate a complex world with confidence.

Maine is not alone in this effort. States like Iowa, Texas, Indiana, Arkansas, North Dakota, Tennessee, and Montana have repealed or are addressing similar exemptions to keep obscene content out of schools. Utah, Idaho, Oklahoma, and Tennessee have set standards for digital filtering. California, Florida, Virginia, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, and Texas have integrated trafficking prevention into curricula, with measurable success in reducing victimization. For example, Texas requires teacher training and high-visibility programs, while California educates both students and staff. LD 1395 positions Maine as a leader, aligning our laws with modern realities and national best practices.

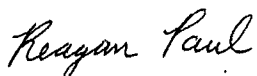
The cost of inaction is steep. In 2015, 71% of Maine law enforcement officers surveyed admitted they were unfamiliar with local anti-trafficking resources, and less than half felt equipped to handle cases involving minors. If our first responders are underprepared, the gap in our schools—where children spend most of their day—is even more concerning. Preble Street’s data shows most victims are trafficked before age 18. Without awareness, a student might miss the signs of coercion. Without training, a teacher might overlook sudden behavioral changes or unexplained absences. Every child we fail to protect faces lifelong trauma, with ripple effects on families and communities. LD 1395 offers a proactive solution, reaching students where they are, before traffickers do.

This bill isn’t just policy—it’s a lifeline for Maine’s children. It says to every student: you are seen, you are valued, and we will arm you with the tools to stay safe. To every educator: you have our trust to be the first line of defense. And to every trafficker: Maine is watching, and we’re fighting back.

This bill balances protection with empowerment, preserving academic freedom while drawing a firm line against content and threats that endanger our children. It’s a chance to build a safer, stronger future for every student in our state.

I urge you to vote in favor of LD 1395. Together, we can protect Maine’s youth and give them the tools to thrive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Reagan Paul
State Representative