

Good morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Educational & Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Casey Beaudoin, and I'm here from Maine Arts Academy to speak in opposition of LD1571

I stand before you today to express my strong opposition to the proposed amendments to the provisions governing teacher qualifications in public charter schools.

This bill seeks to eliminate crucial alternatives that currently allow charter schools to employ talented educators who may not hold traditional teaching certificates but bring valuable expertise to our classrooms. Specifically, I oppose the elimination of provisions that allow teachers to be employed if they:

1. Commit to becoming certified within 3 years of hire
2. Hold advanced degrees in their subject areas
3. Possess professional certification in their fields
4. Bring unique expertise or experience to the classroom

These alternatives were thoughtfully included in the original legislation for good reason. They recognize that effective teaching requires not only pedagogical training but also deep subject matter knowledge and real-world experience—qualities that professionals from various fields can bring to education.

By eliminating these pathways, this bill would:

First, severely restrict charter schools' ability to innovate and fulfill their mission of providing alternative educational approaches. The flexibility to hire professionals with diverse backgrounds is essential to Maine Arts Academy's ability to offer specialized programs and unique educational environments.

Second, it would exacerbate our state's critical teacher shortage, particularly in high-need areas like STEAM, special education, and career technical education. At a time when schools across Maine struggle to fill teaching positions, removing viable pathways into the profession is counterproductive.

Third, it would deprive students of learning from individuals with valuable real-world expertise. A professional illustrator who transitions to teaching art, an engineer who teaches physics, or a published author who leads creative writing classes brings authentic knowledge and passion that benefits students tremendously.

Fourth, it would contradict the principles of charter school autonomy and accountability. Charter schools in general and Maine Arts Academy specifically are held to strict performance standards and can be closed if they fail to deliver results. This accountability model should allow them flexibility in staffing decisions to achieve their educational goals.

While I recognize the importance of ensuring all teachers have proper preparation, I believe there are better approaches than eliminating these alternatives entirely. I urge you to reject this aspect of the bill and maintain the pathways that allow diverse talent to enter our classrooms, while focusing on how we can better support all teachers to succeed.

Thank you for your consideration