

**Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am Jana Lapoint, I'm here today in opposition of LD1571. This past week I was reviewing material for a speech I was delivering for scholarship awards to seven Maine Community College students and I discovered remarks I had made before this body when I was requesting reappointment to the State Board of Education and Senator Millett and Rep. MacDonald were co-chairs. One of my credentials for reappointment was the work I had done on the certification committee. I served 11 years total on that committee. I do not need to be repetitive with what you will hear today in opposition of LD1715. Our charter schools including parents, teachers and students will share their concerns.**

**What I will share with you is the amount of work that was done with certification during those years. As you are aware, the teacher shortage goes back many years and the Board of Education was tasked with finding out why and what we could do to change this. We met with every college in Maine and would initially hear from them that a number of students were not passing the state exam known as PRAXIS Core Academic Skills for Educators and specific PRAXIS II examine based on grade level and subject area. We learned it was mostly in math and another area of listening skills. Many students did not take the exam until they were juniors and had not seen a math course since their sophomore year of high school. Another discovery was students took fewer educational courses, if any, that put them into an educational environment, before their junior year. But by their third year they were locked in and just continued even if they never intended going into teaching after graduation. We suggested getting students into a classroom environment as early as second semester of their freshmen year and also to take that exam earlier. We also discovered that the scores required to pass were higher than our surrounding states. Complicating our situation was that Maine did not have a friendly reciprocal agreement with other states. Every month, we would review how many applications had been received and how long was the backlog in weeks and months. Even with some very outstanding employees this backlog was only minimally reduced. The department has seen a number of employees leave due**

to frustration and feeling overworked. Obviously these and other issues like teacher shortages in 16 areas still exist. Look today, you have a bill on your schedule to change certification requirements in the industrial arts area. These department reviews have been a constant since I was on the board.

A big change, we thought, came when a teacher could secure another pathway to certification by presenting a portfolio instead of taking the State exam. Even the portfolio was difficult to administer and is currently in revision. As I mentioned earlier, the staff at the Department of Education is highly qualified but their work has always been in overload and teachers have been extremely frustrated at the amount of time and paper work it takes for the certification to be approved. Has anything changed today? I would say not much. And now you are considering more paperwork, time delays and much frustration to our charter schools and the uniqueness that we provide for the students of Maine is again being chipped away for a certification that is absolutely not necessary.

May I say, I applaud Senator Pierce's bill to raise the minimum wage to \$45,000 which would help but without the state's financial commitment this would be a difficult adjustment for our charter schools that do not receive financial backing from their local communities to survive.

In conclusion, may I remind you that every one of our charter schools is required to have in their charter what constitutes a "uniquely qualified" teacher. The issues surrounding and not addressed in LD 1571 are numerous. For example, why was the bill submitted when the number of uniquely qualified teachers in our schools is very low in numbers and those schools are performing at above the state average, would the current teachers seeking certification be grandfathered, why would there not be a period of time, like our district public schools, to obtain certification. All of our schools have a Performance Framework that holds them all too extremely high standards that do not exist in our district public schools and is available to every one of you to read. National data on "effective" teachers supports the importance of "relationships" between teachers and students and among students, not bureaucratic licenses.