

## Maine Education Association

Jesse Hargrove President | Beth French Vice President | Jaye Rich Treasurer  
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### Testimony

### In Support Of

### LD 1626: An Act to Improve Professional Development for Educational Technicians and School Support Staff

Jesse Hargrove, President, Maine Education Association

Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

April 25th, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Jesse Hargrove, I am a high school social studies teacher on leave to serve as Maine Education Association President. The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators. Our members include teachers and other educators in nearly every public school in the state, full-time faculty and other professional and support staff in both the University of Maine and Community College systems, and thousands of retired educators.

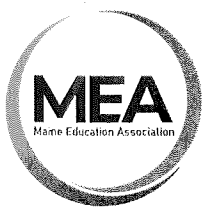
I offer this testimony today on behalf of the MEA in SUPPORT of LD 1626, *An Act to Improve Professional Development for Educational Technicians and School Support Staff*.

My teenage son has spent his April school recess touring colleges in New England. It is hard to believe my wife and I are about to send our first born off to college in the next few years, because it seems like yesterday that I brought him to a two-year wellness checkup where I heard a familiar voice say, "Mr. Hargrove?" It was a former student of mine who I supported as a teacher of students with special needs, working as an intake nurse. While school communities may be local, the impacts extend throughout the state and perhaps much further. I'm so very proud of the special education system we had at that school. Professional Development for all staff was encouraged and supported. I was able to partner with Ed Techs and attend workshops and trainings to better support students with Autism or augmentative communication devices. I had time with my staff to develop programs and discrete trials during Inservice days. We were all involved in PBIS and adolescent development training. I thought this was the norm. I was wrong.

When I moved districts to take a different position in Social Studies. I found that local decision-making excluded support staff from these opportunities. Ed Techs were sent home after the first staff of the staff school year, and rarely were they even made aware of the professional development opportunities to support the unique needs of the students they work with. Things that I had taken for granted in a previous environment. While I respect local control, I also suggest that there are some aspects of education that require state support and broad implementation. Ensuring that our support staff are well

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trained only benefits our students who exist in a mobile society and will relocate for employment, housing, and services.

I've also noticed a change in our educational labor force. When I first began my career, there were a hundred applicants for any Social Studies job. Similar situations existed for other content areas. Aspiring Educators...folks who had education prep training and were actively searching for teaching positions, were encouraged to apply for Education Technician positions to "get their foot in the door", gain some experience, and build a professional network. These folks had taken methods and other developmental courses, bringing a level of pedagogy to the positions. Those times have come and gone. In our current shortages, educators have been able to find positions. We often have single applicants for openings, and districts are cutting Ed Tech positions that haven't been filled over successive years, this doesn't mean the need has diminished. Districts are hiring folks with a variety of backgrounds well into the school year. Ed Techs in these situations may have the least amount of training yet tasked to work with students requiring the most support, leading to problems. Boosting our systemic training program from basic skill acquisition and classroom management to more specialized instruction only benefits our students.

If done well it will likely be part of the solution to our ongoing challenging student behavior situation. Most educators report that they have not received professional development or lacking confidence in behavioral training supports to manage daily student behaviors. The result is a reliance on punitive measures that exacerbate or elevate behavior.<sup>1</sup> There is demonstrated the need for systemic improvements to support students in developing social and academic skills to be successful. We believe in a multipronged approach, with this bill being just one avenue. Educators, and the students they serve, benefit more from sustained professional development programs that include evidence-based practices, modeling, and coaching than from stand-alone opportunities<sup>2</sup>. This bill codifies efforts for systemic fixes in this direction, and we look forward to working with education leaders on continued improvements to our professional development program. I'm happy to address any questions.

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<sup>1</sup> Scheibel, Wilkinson, Fairman, & Tariq, (March 2025) *Maine K-12 Educator and Administrator Experiences Managing Challenging Student Behavior*, Maine Education Policy Research Institute, University of Maine Orono, ME

<sup>2</sup> Brock and Carter (2013), *Effects of a Professional Development Package to Prepare Special Education Paraprofessionals to Implement Evidence-Based Practice*, Journal of Special Education May 2013