

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 1626

AN ACT TO IMPROVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EDUCATIONAL
TECHNICIANS AND SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF

April 25, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Steven Bailey, Executive Director of the Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and the Maine School Superintendents Association in opposition to L.D. 1626.

Our associations look at this bill in a very similar way to L.D. 1097, *An Act to Provide De-escalation and Behavior Intervention Training for School Personnel*, considered by this committee this past Wednesday. We think it is a good concept for a bill and addresses an urgent issue for school districts, staff, and students. However, as written, we view this as an unfunded mandate, and believe that this must be accompanied by robust, consistent state funding to have its desired effects.

L.D. 1626 provides important work for educational support staff, and we believe districts should be doing this work. Some superintendents and school board members did support this proposed legislation and believe this would help all staff – from ed techs to bus drivers – better work with students exhibiting behavioral challenges, an important goal, as we have heard from stakeholders, researchers, and legislators.

The concept and the content of L.D. 1626 are very structured and do include important components of instructional strategies and professional preparation for providing successful educational support for students with whom they will be expected to work. However, while well-intentioned, we have concerns about school districts' current capacity for this work. This training requires both appropriate funding and dedicated time, which currently are not available within the yearly start-up procedures for school systems.

During the opening of school in-service days, district staff are expected to receive training in blood borne pathogens, harassment prevention, bullying prevention training, child neglect and abuse reporting, and suicide prevention. In addition, instructional staff often meet in teams to discuss plans for students they will have in their classrooms. If new instructional programs are expected to be implemented, time is needed there, as well, to prepare staff for what is needed within classroom instruction. Special education staff receive training in de-escalation strategies and non-crisis intervention.

Finding and making meaningful time to do what is expected within L.D. 1626 is unlikely to be able to happen without additional resources – likely meaning additional funding to pay for the training and for more required in-service days. Without this additional support, schools will be unable to implement these practices and meet the goals of this bill – to ensure each staff member is best prepared to work with students of all needs.

Another concern is the prescriptive approach included within the bill. This bill would require training on many specific components for every school staff member – with additional requirements for Ed Techs. Ed Techs serve many different roles within a school – do they all need this specific training? We would suggest more differentiated instruction, based on the skills and needs of students that each staff member works with. There is belief in the need and the content for the work, and it will be important to have local district flexibility.

Again, we believe this is a well-intentioned bill, and a concept that should support important preparatory work by staff to lead to appropriate strategic work with students. But without appropriate and consistent funding, we are worried this could only lead to more frustration among staff.

This budget cycle is seeing many competing bills, and our legislative committees realize that beyond maintaining 55% of education funding, and hopefully providing full funding for school meals for all students, there may be precious little money to support bills like L.D. 1626. If little or no state funding is ultimately available, our associations feel we must oppose this proposed legislation.

Thank you for your consideration – I am happy to take any questions you might have.