

Good afternoon, Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, Members of the Labor Committee. My name is Rick Beaulé. I'm a 22-year teacher of Music, currently at Gardiner Regional Middle School in MSAD 11. I live in Durham, and am here today in opposition to Bill LD1400: "An Act To Exempt CERTAIN Public School Districts and Their Employees from the Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program."

I love this state. It is an absolute dream come true for me to be able to live and work here. It's unfortunate that my diabetes means it literally takes me longer to recover from illness than others. I use more sick time than others whose immune systems are not compromised. With PFML, the financial hit that I would take in those instances is greatly reduced.

My recently divorced colleague with three kids who's encouraged to stay home when they're sick benefits from this. Another who required multiple surgeries after being hit by a car. One who required additional time for convalescence from a surgery. One who had to take time off to deal with legal procedures and details involving the passing of a parent. One who underwent cancer treatment. The very reasons PFML was created.

Ladies and gentlemen, that's just in my building. MSAD 11 alone has six schools, a central office, and a bus barn. Across the state? You can do the math.

You may have noticed that I emphasized the word CERTAIN earlier. I did so because we, as educators, are most CERTAINLY targeted in this bill. Just us. That's a frustrating thing to we educators because without us, none of this would exist.

Take a look around at this amazing place as you leave today and walk in tomorrow. In a quiet moment, you can literally FEEL and HEAR the history these walls have seen. And as you do, remember that none of it would be here, were it not for educators.

The design and construction of the building. The music performed within it. Every speech and testimony in this room and throughout the building is because of educators. The food you eat, the clothes you wear, the clean room in which you're working, heck, even the language of this bill didn't just happen. ALL of it is because of teachers, ed techs, administrators, and physical plant employees in school districts like mine, who've worked to support young minds that will someday create places like this.

This bill provides us all with an opportunity to decide something deeper about ourselves: who we are as humans and Mainers.

Article I, Section 6-A of the Maine State Constitution states that "...no person shall be deprived of equal protection of the laws..." of this state. You may question the legal

application I bring here, but the premise of this clause is not in doubt: Our laws are supposed to benefit Maine as a society, and this bill doesn't.

Which makes me wonder. Why? Why target us? And make no mistake, we are the targets. It's in the very title of the bill. The most benign of reasons for sponsoring or favoring this legislation scream that money spent on supporting my colleagues and I isn't equal to money spent on others with the same challenges. We are apparently just not worthy.

Arguments that educators already have sick leave banks gloss over that each district has different requirements for it to be used, ignores that we risk our own leave by donating it for others to use, and that leave banks came about because sometimes contracted leave time isn't enough- the very thing PFML was meant to address.

The nurturing of our children is the most sacred thing we as humans can do for ourselves. Yet, if this bill passes, those who have taken on this role in our society will, yet again, be deemed less worthy of the protections supposed to be afforded all Mainers under its Constitution.

Author Glynn Stewart says in one of his writings that, "Without freedom, unity is just oppression." Exempting educators from something all should be entitled to enjoy means LD1400 provides none of the unity, but all of the oppression. Please, vote it down. I thank you for your time and would be happy to entertain any questions.