



Joseph E. Rafferty
Senator, District 34

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony in Support of LD 1718

"An Act to Establish the Maine Charter School Commissioner as A Public Instrumentality of the State"

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
May 1, 2025**

Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Joseph Rafferty and I proudly represent Senate District 34 which includes the communities of Berwick, North Berwick, Wells, Kennebunk and Kennebunkport.

Today I come before you seeking passage of LD 1780 "An Act to Establish the Maine Charter Commissioner as A Public Instrumentality of the State." This bill was brought to my attention by Mr. Higgins in a conversation we had early in this session. Being honest with you, I agreed to carry it forward with the mindset it's worthy of a hearing.

Since then, I received feedback that the Charter Committee are not State Employees. I thought they were and that they came under the oversight of the State Board of Education. I was wrong. They are employed by a temp agency.

It was at the recommendation of DAFS that the Charter Committee brought this forward. As it exists, DAFS describe the current set up as a "poor use of public funds". The proposed change will result in an estimated annual savings of approximately \$100,000 in taxpayer funds. The three staff members are classified as temporary employees, which requires us to pay significant annual fees to a staffing agency. In reality, these staff members have served the Commission for 1, 3, and 8 years, respectively.

This bill streamlines the Commission's internal operations to reduce unnecessary administrative costs and increase financial flexibility. The reclassification to a Public Instrumentality will ensure the Commission can process payments efficiently and maintain fiscal independence in line with other state instrumentalities.

The savings from this proposal will be reinvested directly into public school students and educators. Importantly, this bill does *not* change the Commission's funding model (school fees) or its authority in authorizing and monitoring schools. The changes are strictly related to internal operations.

I urge you to consider the passage of LD 1718 and would be happy to answer questions although I believe Executive Director Ewing would do a better job of that following her testimony.