

Testimony to the Maine Education and Cultural Affairs Committee in Support of LD 1718, "An Act to Establish the Maine Charter School Commission as a Public Instrumentality of the State"

Good Morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Lana Ewing, and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Charter School Commission. I am here in support of Senator Rafferty's proposed legislation, LD 1718, to reclassify the Maine Charter School Commission as a body corporate and politic and a public instrumentality of the State. Senator Rafferty's bill will streamline our operations and make us more efficient, as well as allow us to eliminate costly overhead, resulting in significant savings that can be redirected to better support charter public schools, and their public school students and staff.

Today, I will focus on the potential savings this reclassification will enable, while Amy Allen, the Commission's Operations Director, will address the operational efficiencies in greater detail.

To begin, while we wholeheartedly agree with these proposed changes, it is important to underscore that this reclassification recommendation originated with the **Department of Administrative and Financial Services**. In looking at other comparable entities in our state, the Department, on its own accord, determined that rather than operate as an independent entity, the Commission should be a body corporate and politic and public instrumentality. This recommendation is not just about consistency across our government, but it is also about streamlining operations to reduce unnecessary costs and increase financial flexibility.

Under the Commission's current structure, we face several challenges. For example, unlike other public instrumentalities, we are unable to: use state-issued credit cards to pay bills, open a bank account to manage funds directly, and contract directly with employees without intermediaries.

This red tape results in significant and unnecessary costs. For example, because of these limitations, we are forced to rely on temporary staffing services, such as Atlantic Staffing Group, to hire staff. This arrangement incurs significant costs, including fees that do not contribute to the long-term stability or benefit of our team. Reclassifying the Commission would allow us to **save approximately \$100,000 annually**, with most of those savings currently being spent on temporary staffing fees.

The savings from reclassification would not only allow the Commission to be better stewards of taxpayer dollars, but it would also allow us to allocate these much-needed funds to directly support charter public schools. Our plan is to collaborate with charter public schools to determine how to most effectively and efficiently allocate these savings, most likely directing them toward supporting teacher professional development and/or other services to directly benefit students. There is no shortage of ways that these funds can be invested to help deliver a strong ROI on behalf of our charter public school community. Spending them on overhead, as we are currently forced to do, is not only a bad use of taxpayer dollars, but it is also a wasted opportunity to better support public school teachers and students.

In closing, this bill represents an important and critical step toward improving the operational effectiveness and financial stewardship of the Maine Charter School Commission. We are grateful for your consideration of this important legislation and the opportunity to continue to strengthen our public education community in Maine.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lana Ewing

Executive Director, Maine Charter School Commission