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LD 1881

An Act to Ensure the Rights of Parents of Minor Children in Education May 9, 2025

Senator Joseph Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and my distinguished colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on Education: I am Elizabeth Caruso, and I have the honor of representing the people of House District 72, which includes 33 towns and territories in Somerset County. I am pleased to present to you LD 1881, "An Act to Ensure the Rights of Parents of Minor Children in Education." This legislation addresses a fundamental aspect of our society: the primacy of parental rights in the upbringing and education of children.

I stand before you today to advocate for the passage of LD 1881, "An Act to Ensure the Rights of Parents of Minor Children in Education." This legislation addresses a fundamental aspect of our society: the primacy of parental rights in the upbringing and education of children.

LD 1881 codifies several key rights, ensuring that parents are fully informed and involved in their child's education. These rights, while seemingly self-evident, merit explicit legislative protection in our evolving social landscape.

The bill has several core components:

Access to Information: The bill guarantees parents the right to access all information pertaining to their minor child's school activities, including a comprehensive review of mental, emotional, and physical healthcare services, as well as all instructional materials, including those used in virtual learning environments. This provision ensures transparency and empowers parents to make informed decisions regarding their child's education.

Review of Health Questionnaires: Parents are entitled to receive well-being questionnaires or health screening forms before they are administered to their children. This allows parents to review the content and purpose of these forms, ensuring they align with their values and beliefs.

Access to Records: LD 1881 grants parents the right to access their child's healthcare and educational records. This is critical for parents to have a complete understanding of their child's academic progress and overall well-being.

Right to Deny Participation: The bill affirms the right of parents to decline their child's participation in noneducational or core assignments, activities, or services, and to request

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alternative arrangements. This provision respects the diversity of parental beliefs and values, allowing them to guide their child's education in accordance with their conscience.

Restrictions on School Procedures: LD 1881 prohibits school administrative units from adopting procedures or student support forms that would prevent school personnel from notifying parents about their child's mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being, or that encourage students to withhold such information from their parents. This safeguard ensures open communication between schools and parents, fostering a collaborative approach to a child's education and well-being.

Personnel Responsibilities: The bill further prohibits school personnel from discouraging or preventing parental notification and involvement in significant decisions affecting a student's education, learning, or health. This provision underscores the importance of parental involvement in all critical aspects of a child's development.

Exception for Abuse or Neglect: Finally, the bill includes a carefully crafted exception, allowing school personnel to withhold information from a parent if there is reasonable belief that disclosure would result in abuse, neglect, or abandonment. This exception balances parental rights with the paramount need to protect children from harm.

Parents and taxpayers have a right to know what is being taught to their children as well as to know if their child is in crisis. Recently, we have seen falling proficiency test scores, graduation rates, mental health diagnoses, and other disturbing trends.

Given these progressions, we need to seek greater parental and community involvement, not less.

Teachers and schools are valuable contributors to a child's education. However, it's the parents who have the ultimate responsibility for the direction, wellbeing, and matters concerning their minor children. Parents' roles should never be discarded or reduced in effect.

Maine schools should be a place of collaboration between parents and teachers, counselors and other school personnel. We need laws that reaffirm parents' fundamental rights, that places parents firmly in charge of the upbringing, education and well-being of their minor child, while respecting and valuing the role of teachers and schools. Nobody is more invested nor as directly and overarchingly responsible in a child's education, mental and physical health than a child's own parents.

In conclusion, LD 1881 is a carefully balanced and essential piece of legislation that reinforces the fundamental rights of parents in the education of their children. It promotes transparency, communication, and collaboration between parents and schools, while also safeguarding the well-being of students. I urge you to give this bill your full support.

I thank you for thoughtful consideration of this commonsense bill, and I ask for your support.