

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 1853

AN ACT TO ESTABLISH AN EDUCATIONAL TAX CREDIT PROGRAM TO HELP PARENTS PAY FOR NONPUBLIC SCHOOL TUITION AND FEES

May 16, 2025

Senator Grohoski, Representative Cloutier, and members of the Taxation Committee, I am Steven Bailey, the 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 strong opposition to L.D. 1853, An Act to Establish an Educational Tax Credit Program to Help Parents Pay for Nonpublic School Tuition and Fees.

This bill would create a school voucher program that would subsidize private schooling with limited accountability, take valuable money away from state coffers, and harm public education across Maine.

L.D. 1853 Would Amount to an Enormous Subsidy on Private Education

L.D. 1853 would allow for parents to take a tax credit, beginning on or after January 1st, 2026, equal to 70 percent of the per-pupil cost of education, to send their child to a nonpublic school. We expect this could represent an enormous cost to our state and Maine's public education system. According to the National Center on Education Statistics¹, more than 18,000 Maine children attended private schools in 2021. If we estimate the per-pupil cost of education at around \$15,000, this tax credit would cost the state close to \$190 million solely to benefit families who already have the means to attend private schools.

This would remove a huge portion of Maine's tax revenue that could be spent on many other crucial needs, such as public education, healthcare, or property tax relief.

In states that have adopted a school voucher system, 70 percent² of the students who used vouchers were already in private schools before the voucher system went into place. A recent study³ from the Annenberg Institute found that many private schools actually increased their tuition and fees by as much as 25 percent following the introduction of such voucher programs. These programs do not open up new opportunities – they simply represent an enormous public subsidy for private education.

¹ <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest-dashboard/state/maine>

² <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/most-students-getting-new-school-choice-funds-arent-ditching-public-schools/2023/10>

³ <https://edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai24-949.pdf>

This Would Only Hurt Maine's Most Vulnerable Children and Families

We also know that the most vulnerable students likely would be hurt the most by a bill such as L.D. 1853. Private schools are not required to admit students with disabilities. That means these students could be denied admissions or be denied the critical services that they need to be educated and thrive.

This program also would not benefit all families – just those who can afford it. Under this L.D., a family would still be required to pay nonpublic school tuition up-front, only getting reimbursed by the state the next year, when they get back their tax refund from the state. This means only the most well-off, with substantial upfront resources, could benefit from this system.

Lack of Accountability

Perhaps most concerning, this bill would contain nearly no accountability for how this funding would be spent. A family would only need to provide “a receipt, proof of payment and proof of eligibility” to receive this tax credit to send their child to any nonpublic school. Maine rightfully has set standards for its public schools, as well as requirements for private schools that receive public funds. These standards include health, safety, employing certified teachers, and providing curriculum aligned with the Maine Learning Results.

Using this tax credit system would appear to allow families to go around these rules and send their children to any school, with no accountability on their safety and quality.

L.D. 1853 is an enormously damaging bill that would hurt the most vulnerable students, remove crucial accountability measures from our education system, and represent an enormous subsidy to private schools. For these reasons, we urge you to reject this bill.

Thank you and I am happy to take any questions you may have.