

TESTIMONY NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST

L.D. 2105

AN ACT TO UPDATE MAINE'S MANDATED REPORTING LAWS

January 27, 2026

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Eric Waddell, Executive Director for Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association neither for nor against L.D. 2105.

Maine's local public school leaders fully appreciate the intent of this bill and its goals: to strengthen Maine's mandated reporter laws and to make the process clearer for reporters and child welfare staff.

Our members agree that reform is sorely needed. Schools have seen too many examples of reported suspected abuse or neglect that landed on someone's desk with no follow up. Gaps and delays exist in Maine's child welfare system, and more must be done to remedy these issues. L.D. 2105 boosts training and requires DHHS to report cases to the District Attorney's office. It also expands the definition of a mandated reporter. We believe this is consistent with the existing policies of many schools—policies which already require all employees and volunteers to report suspected abuse and neglect.

However, our Associations do have questions about the implications of a few provisions of this bill. A section on page 2 of the bill explicitly requires that "*A person with first-hand information about the suspected child abuse or neglect must make the report.*" Our Associations understand the goal of such a change: to remove gaps and delays in the information-gathering process.

School leaders share these goals as well, but this change would require major shifts in educational policies and training. Many schools use a "designated agent" system and require staff to report potential cases of abuse or neglect to a principal or counselor, who then make reports to DHHS, and who have experience working with the child welfare system. Would a new teacher, volunteer, or school bus driver have the same knowledge of how to navigate the system? If these decisions were solely left up to the staff member, we worry that some of these gaps could persist because of this inexperience and/or lack of knowledge or confidence in the process of filing a report.

We also have questions regarding the timeframes in this bill. L.D. 2105 would require staff to file reports with DHHS "at the first reasonable opportunity but no later than 48 hours." While we understand the need for timely reporting, school leaders expressed concerns about the feasibility of this provision in certain situations. For example, if a teacher learns of suspected abuse or neglect on a Friday afternoon, they may want to speak with a principal or school counselor before submitting a report. Under this bill, the teacher would be unable to

wait until Monday morning and would have to report over the weekend. While we understand the reasoning behind this tight deadline, we would ask that reporters be given more flexibility in these situations.

Superintendents and school board members fully support the need to strengthen Maine's child welfare system, and we would be pleased to continue to work with your committee to find ways to improve the system moving forward.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I am happy to take any questions you may have.