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**Testimony in SUPPORT of LD 1130 –  
“An Act to Provide Traffic Safety Education in Maine”**

April 11, 2017

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Good afternoon Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Lauri Boxer-Macomber. I am a resident of Portland, Maine here today to testify in support of LD 1130.

I testify as the mother of two children who attend public schools in the State of Maine. I firmly believe that the proposed traffic safety education is important for them and their peers, particularly those who do not have access to traffic safety education in their homes. It is within our public schools that traffic safety information and training can be made available to all students, regardless of the language, cultural and socioeconomic barriers.

I also come before you today as an attorney with a background in community development who practices personal injury law. I spend my days representing people throughout the State of

Maine who have been killed or seriously injured in traffic crashes while riding their bicycles, walking or driving their motor vehicles. Unfortunately, there are far too many of those people.

Data from the National Safety Council indicates that there were over 40,000 motor vehicle traffic deaths last year, which is up 6% since 2015. Likewise, national pedestrian fatalities are on the rise. According to a recent story in the New York Times, “pedestrian deaths are climbing faster than motorist fatalities, reaching nearly 6,000 deaths last year — the highest total in more than two decades.” Similarly, the National Highway Safety Administration reports that in 2015, an average of two bicyclists died every day due to motor vehicle v. bicycle crashes.

In Maine, the trends are similar. Last year we saw our largest number of pedestrian deaths in decades, multiple bicyclist deaths and 160 motor vehicle fatalities. The Maine DOT also recently reported that during the time period of 2011-2015, there was an average of one fatal crash in our state every 60 hours, one personal injury crash in our state every 56 minutes and one reportable crash every 17 minutes! *See MDOT, Maine Highway Safety Facts 2016 (Dec. 2016).*

Put simply, the United States and the State of Maine are in the midst of a serious public safety crisis.

Sadly, as a society, we have somehow become callous when it comes to these traffic statistics. Despite the fact that our family members, neighbors and co-workers are regularly being killed and seriously harmed in traffic crashes, we have come to accept traffic deaths and injuries as a norm. We simply expect that a certain percentage of people, who leave for their dog walks, drive to the store for groceries or ride their bikes to work will never make it home.

Many people in our state go on multi-tasking while driving, ignoring the rules of the road and rushing off to their next destination as if they are not a part of the problem and are somehow personally immune from tragedy.

I am here today to ring the alarm. What is going on is not okay. It is not normal. It should not be tolerated by our lawmakers.

I am here before you, the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, because the solution to bringing an end to all of these tragic deaths and injuries on our roadways is multi-faceted. It does not lie within one person, profession, agency or branch of government. To reverse this trend and save more lives from being lost on Maine roadways, we all must do our part, including each of you as a member of this committee.

This committee has an opportunity to pass legislation that will truly be life-changing and life-saving. Schools are some of the only places in the State of Maine where we can access nearly all of our residents and begin to shift societal norms. If we can teach traffic safety from an early age and reinforce it each year, with time, it is believed that we will have safer roadways and fewer traffic deaths and serious injuries in the State.

From a financial standpoint, traffic crashes are also costing our state and taxpayers a lot of money. Traffic crashes are expensive. According to the National Safety Council, the estimated cost of motor-vehicle deaths, injuries, and property damage in 2016 was \$432.5 billion. These costs include wage and productivity losses, medical expenses, administrative expenses, employer costs, and property damage.

In Maine, while private insurance is sometimes available to help with the aftermath of traffic crashes, it is not uncommon for the state to pick up the tab for rescue services, medical treatment and other needs of an injured victim. This is particularly so in cases where the injured person did not follow the rules of the road and there is no ability to recover from a private entity. In such cases, MaineCare and other public benefit program dollars are used to address the victim's needs.

My own experience indicates that there are a number of such cases in Maine and many of them involve children. I have a clear recollection of one case that I turned down involving a child who was injured on a Maine roadway do to his own unsafe operation of a bicycle. When I met with the mother of the child, she told me how someone had gifted her child a bicycle, but no one had taught the child how to safely operate it. The mother did not ride a bicycle, had limited English

skills and had no idea of where she could go to teach her son how to safely get around his bike. So, she simply let the child take the bike out onto the roadway where he ultimately ended up injured by a motor vehicle. Because the family had no private health insurance, and because the motorist that hit the child was not at fault, the State of Maine ended up paying for his most of his care and is probably still paying. Had this boy received the education being proposed through this legislation, perhaps his injuries could have been prevented and our State's MaineCare dollars directed elsewhere.

There are also a number of other reasons why traffic safety education in our schools is not only logical, but necessary. The State of Maine cannot in good conscience continue to encourage people to walk and bicycle for health, environmental, transportation and other reasons without also teaching them the rules of the road. Similarly, we cannot expect teenagers to fully appreciate the dangers of distracted driving and operating around vulnerable users when drivers' education programs are not equally accessible to all Mainers.

As this committee considers the proposed legislation, it should also understand that Maine educators are not being asked to unilaterally bear the burden of preventing traffic deaths and serious injuries on our roadways. Rather, the proposed legislation inferentially asks our educators to partner with our law enforcement officers, our traffic engineers, our legislators, our district attorneys, our city planners and others in a comprehensive and multi-faceted solution to a complex problem. The Maine Department of Transportation can push for safer infrastructure and the Department of Public Safety can issue traffic citations all day long, but until we educate our residents about the rules of the roadway and the importance of following the same, we will continue to see large numbers of traffic fatalities and serious injuries in our state.

Finally, it should not go without saying that the "ask" of the proposed legislation is not large. It does not require educators to take on an area outside their expertise or work more hours. It leaves them with considerable autonomy and many options and resources for implementation. It would be myopic to oppose this legislation for fear of overburdening our teachers. Teachers do not want to see their students continuing to be harmed and killed in traffic deaths. They want

students happy, healthy and alive in their classrooms. Many of them also are believed to support this effort.

In sum, please vote to support LD 1130.

Thank you.