

Alan Cobo-Lewis
Orono

Chairwoman Daughtry, Chairman Brennan, Distinguished Members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Alan Cobo-Lewis. I live in Orono, where my two children have attended elementary, middle and high school. During that time, we have chosen each year whether to take them out of school on Jewish high holy days, choosing some years to keep them in school, some years to take them out the whole day for religious observance, and choosing most years to send them for part of the day and then pick them up early for specific observance. These choices have been ours as a family, and we have sometimes made them on short notice, as there have been additional constraints including whether there was adequate support available at the time for my son who has a disability. The short notice is an issue under current statute, but LD 55 would rectify that.

Current statute does allow absences for recognized religious observance to be excused, but only with prior approval. This is discriminatory against all religions—we did once see school activities in middle school scheduled for Good Friday, for example. But current statute is especially discriminatory against minority religions, as it is far more common for important school activities to be scheduled during a minority religious holiday than during a majority religious holiday—we've never seen an exam scheduled during Christmas, for example.

Thank you to Rep Fecteau for sponsoring LD 55. In respect to all Mainers of faith, please vote the bill Ought To Pass.