

Brian Kresge
Bangor

As President of Congregation Beth Israel in Bangor, Maine's oldest extant Jewish house of worship, and as a parent of school-aged children, I am voicing my strong support for LD 55, "An Act to Protect Minority Religious Groups by Eliminating the Prior Approval Requirement for a School Absence for a Recognized Religious Holiday."

Being a member of a minority faith in an area that is predominantly Christian always carries with it certain impositions. One of them is experienced the most by our children. Our religious observances, just as it surely is for other minority faiths, are simply not convenient for the academic endeavors of our children.

One of the onerous burdens that this bill would absolutely relieve is the requirement that a student and parent(s) receive "prior approval" for a religious observance. First and foremost, it's easy to forget that we must do this. For many of us who have moved from areas where there is a greater presence of religious minorities, this requirement can be quite shocking.

Secondly, it creates a sense of state-reinforced "otherness," in that we must prevail upon a system of government for permission for us to conduct ourselves in accordance with our faith, with possible criminal penalty if we do not. This is a very significant intrusion on our rights under the Establishment Clause.

Third, that same otherness helps foster social stigmas for our children, many of whom are already uncomfortable as members of a minority faith.

Finally, should we fail to obtain prior approval, our children do not receive the benefit of academic accommodation for our observances. This is egregious, and LD 55 will remedy this circumstance.

There should never be a penalty for religious observance of any kind in the United States of America and the great state of Maine. LD 55 will rectify the very damaging status quo.

Sincerely,
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