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Testimony of Representative Tiffany D. Roberts presenting
LD 261, "Resolve, Directing the Department of Education To Study Truancy Trends in the State and Develop Recommendations for Increasing Student Attendance and Reducing Truancy"
before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Good afternoon Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. I am Representative Tiffany Roberts, and I represent House District 6, which includes parts of North Berwick and South Berwick. I am here today to present **LD 261, Resolve, Directing the Department of Education To Study Truancy Trends in the State and Develop Recommendations for Increasing Student Attendance and Reducing Truancy.**

In Maine, truancy is defined under two scenarios. One being students who have reached the age of 7, and not yet completed sixth grade, having seven full days of unexcused absences, or five consecutive school days of unexcused absences. The other is students who have completed sixth grade having 10 full days of unexcused absences or seven consecutive days of unexcused absences for.

Frequent truancies impact the ability for students to be successful in academic settings. According to the U.S. Department of Education, children who are chronically absent in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade are much less likely to read at grade level by the third grade. Students who cannot read at grade level by the end of third grade are four times more likely than proficient readers to drop out of high school.

According to the Maine Department of Education, over 30,300 or 16.8% of Maine K-12 students were chronically absent in the 2018-2019 school year (meaning that a student is absent for at

least 10% of the days that they are enrolled in an educational institution). In 2016, the Department reported that over 27,600 or 15% of Maine K-12 students were chronically absent. So you can see that there has been an increase in somewhat normal times. Now, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, attendance during remote and hybrid learning has become a growing concern and presents an opportunity for truancy and chronic absenteeism to increase.

Oftentimes, rectifying truancy issues fall to our school administrators who find themselves stretched to capacity. We need to find solutions to address our statewide truancy issues without exhausting the minimal resources some school administrators have access to. Our school districts need effective tools to properly address this issue.

LD 261 calls for the Maine Department of Education to conduct a comprehensive study on truancy trends and develop recommendations for supporting school administrators in increasing student attendance, in addition to submitting a report to this committee that will help inform future legislation on this issue.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions or to provide you with any information for your upcoming work session.