



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

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COMMISSIONER

March 8, 2021

Senator Matthea Daughtry, Co-chair
Representative Michael Brennan, Co-chair
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Dear Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan, and Members of the Joint Committee,

LD 362, Resolve, To Require the Department of Education To Form a Family Income Data Collection Working Group includes in Section 1 directing the Department to form a working group and outlines membership of that group. Section 2 outlines the duties of the group and states that a proposed outcome should be that family income data collection is not accomplished via child nutrition programs.

Section 3 calls for a report to be submitted by January 4, 2022 and provides the authority for the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs to submit legislation based on the Group's recommendations.

To find an alternate means of obtaining family income data used by various programs as data obtained via child nutrition programs can be understated due to reluctance or inability of families to complete the necessary data collection instruments.

The Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) studies the economically disadvantaged component of the Essential Programs and Services (EPS) model; this component relies on income data to be submitted to school administrative units via an alternate form (not part of child nutrition). The most recent study is available on the Department's website and the component is slated to be reviewed again in FY 2022.

The bill is not consistent with current practice. However, as there is interest nationally and in Maine to move to universal feeding, obtaining income data via child nutrition programs will not be possible if the move is successful. However, until that occurs, Child Nutrition will be held to USDA requirements, not Maine Department of Education. Many other programs rely on this data to distribute funds; therefore, an alternate methodology for data collection or, identifying economically disadvantaged students will be needed.

There are several concerns with this bill regarding policy and /or implementation:

- There is a short turnaround time for the group to do work and submit a report – rushing to meet this deadline will not provide the group enough time to research and analyze alternate methods of data collection and identification.
- MEPRI's upcoming economically disadvantaged study could be expanded to include this, instead of having another workgroup.

- If the bill is enacted, representatives from Maine Revenue Services (Taxation) should be added to the membership list as that agency collects income data. Also, Maine Department of Labor should be added due to that agency's interest in accurate student-level economic status information to assess education outcomes, which in turn are important to workforce development programs and outcomes.

The bill should be expanded to include alternate methods of identifying economically disadvantaged students and not just limiting that to income data. A suggestion would be to have the resolve identify a new method of measuring child poverty in Maine, using indicators that are identifiable, measurable, and available for collection.

The Department is currently participating in a pilot program with the US Department of Education and US Census that involves internally cross-referencing student address information with census data to help identify students living in poverty. This pilot may facilitate the development of a new method of measuring child poverty in Maine.

The Maine Department of Education is happy to provide additional information on LD 362 and answer questions during the upcoming work session.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

Joanne Allen

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Joanne Allen, Director

School Finance and Operations