

TESTIMONY

In support of

LD 52: “An Act Regarding Collective Bargaining Negotiations by Public Employers of Teachers”

Grace Leavitt, President, Maine Education Association

**Before the Committee on Education and
Cultural Affairs
March 29th, 2021**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and esteemed members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Grace Leavitt. I am a Spanish teacher on leave from Greely High School while serving as President of the Maine Education Association. The MEA has nearly 24,000 members—faculty and staff in our pre-K-12 public schools, our institutions of higher education, and many dedicated retired educators.

I am speaking on behalf of our members in support of LD 52: “An Act Regarding Collective Bargaining Negotiations by Public Employers of Teachers”.

Just a little over a year ago, in February of 2020, I stood before this committee to speak in support of the amended version LD 1879, ““An Act Regarding Negotiations by Public Employers of Teachers”. Those of you who were on this committee in the 129th Legislature likely remember it. Same bill, same support, this will be nearly the same testimony, just a different date. I am 100% this bill was on the brink of being passed and signed into law, but the COVID-19 global pandemic had other plans in mind.

The work that went into this bill was a tremendous effort on the part of the sponsor, Representative Brennan, all of the following educational organizations—Maine School Management (MSMA), Maine Principals Association (MPA), Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities (MADSEC), Maine Curriculum Leaders Association (MCLA), the MEA, and included the leadership of Commissioner of Education Makin and several staff members of the Maine Department of Education. We spent countless hours meeting and discussing this bill—countless!—even convening the groups on Saturday mornings because of busy schedules. We appreciate all that went into the work. There were two very positive outcomes: we arrived at consensus—yes, consensus!—on the bill, and we got to know one another quite well. A byproduct of this, I believe, was that this effort left these organizations in

the best place possible for what would happen next, though it was unbeknownst to us at the time, and that is the tremendous collaboration that has been ongoing among these groups throughout the many challenges of this pandemic. I have said often, for being in such a bad place (the pandemic), Maine's public education leaders and our school system could not have found themselves in a better place.

LD 52, as LD 1879 before it, does two things: first and foremost, two important topics—1) preparation and planning time and 2) transfers—will now be 'permissive' subjects of bargaining. If either the Association or the School Board ask to discuss these topics at the negotiating table, the other side can agree to do so or can decide not to do so—it is permitted, whereas up until now these have been considered 'prohibited'. It is, of course, our hope that if there is a concern with either of these subjects, both sides would agree to work towards a solution, just as our organizations worked toward a solution in arriving at this proposed legislation. The possibility of this occurring is a substantial change from what has been the situation and is a positive step towards increased collaboration and problem-solving.

Second, this bill addresses the 'meet and consult' process, which has been broken. It clarifies what needs to happen when a change in policy is planned so that the perspectives of the Association will be heard and given due consideration. Again, it is our hope that this clearer process will result in better decisions for the good of both educators and our students. Also, the bill makes it clear that the School Board or administration may initiate the meet and consult process.

As with any legislation that passes, proper implementation is key. Both MEA and MSMA have committed to work together on training for our respective members. If the previous bill, along with our world, had not been derailed by the pandemic, some of our local districts might have had a bit smoother time figuring out the many issues that had to be confronted in order to provide our students with their continued education. Thankfully, in many cases there was collaboration in these efforts—a sign that, with this legislation, that will continue and even improve going forward.

Our educators have much work to do ahead of us—many challenges yet to face and for which to find solutions. LD 52 moves us in the direction of better relationships among those who must work together to meet those challenges.

We urge your support of LD 52.

Thank you for your time, and I am glad to answer any questions.

35 Community Drive- Augusta, ME 04330-8005 - 207-622-5866 800-452-8709 - 207-632-2129 fax www.maineaa.org