

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 993

AN ACT TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF INFECTIOUS DISEASE IN SCHOOLS

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Steven Bailey, executive director of Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association in opposition to L.D. 993.

School districts across this state have been working since last March to keep students and staff safe through the COVID pandemic and accommodate teachers concerned about working in the building.

In-person instruction only became viable when strict distancing requirements were implemented, which for most districts meant going to a hybrid model of some in-person and remote learning. A few districts had the space to spread out, but not many.

There is no substitute for in-person learning in a classroom with a trained and caring teacher. With widespread vaccination now becoming viable, we look forward to opening schools up for as many days as possible. It is what parents want and what students need, and it is the obligation of the public education system in Maine.

L.D. 993 does not support that goal. It would give two work weeks of paid leave to school employees who have been advised to self-quarantine for reasons related to COVID or are experiencing COVID symptoms and are seeking a medical diagnosis.

Two weeks also would be granted to employees who have a child whose school or daycare has closed due to COVID-19 precautions or one who is “experiencing other circumstances” as determined by an emergency rule that is not yet written.

This is an unfunded mandate on schools and takes us backward from opening schools up more broadly where and when it is feasible. It is not in the best interest of the children we serve.

We all agree that state CDC guidelines have to be followed and the mandatory return to school rules from the Department of Education. Those guidelines include distancing, face masks, hand hygiene and quarantine when warranted.

This bill, however, goes beyond those guidelines. It mandates action from Augusta, circumvents local control and disenfranchises local School Boards and voters.