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***Representative David McCrea Introducing
LD 429, “An Act To Protect the Health of Students and Educators by Requiring the
Establishment of Health and Safety Committees in School Administrative Districts”
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs***

Good afternoon Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. I am Representative David McCrea and I represent the nine communities of House District 148 in the central part of the County. I am a lifelong resident of Fort Fairfield. I am here to present **LD 429, “An Act To Protect the Health and Safety of Students and Educators by Requiring the Establishment of Health and Safety Committees in School Administrative Districts.”**

As many of you may already know, I proudly taught in the Fort Fairfield school system for my entire career. It is through those eyes that I am pleased to present **LD 429.**

Without question, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the valuable role our public schools play not only for the development and well-being of students, but also for the economic well-being of families.

I put this bill in last fall when the school reopening discussions were happening around the state and I was deeply worried about the health and safety of students, educators and all support staff in our schools. The reopening of schools in the fall was frightening for many. Some may have health conditions putting them at risk of death or major sickness should they contract COVID-19. Other educators may live with someone who is either elderly or may have a preexisting condition. All of these fears were compounded with the idea of going back to in-person instruction while a global pandemic was happening around us.

The fact is, if we want educators to do their best work, they too must feel safe and supported in schools. We may all have different ideas about what is safe and reasonable during a pandemic, but I hope there is no denying that if we want teachers and other educators as well as support staff to do their best work with students, they will need to feel safe.

District 148 Caswell, Easton, Fort Fairfield, Hamlin, Limestone, Presque Isle (part), Stockholm, and Cyr Plantation, plus the unorganized territory of Connor Township

I believe information and collaboration are the best antidotes to fear and concern. And that is why I put in this bill to require all school districts to have health and safety committees in place. I fully recognize by the time this bill becomes law, and I hope it will become law, this pandemic will hopefully be waning. But the fact remains – this pandemic has stirred up concerns about the health and safety of everyone working in schools and the best way to make sure everyone is working together to support students is to work together to make sure everyone feels safe.

The language in the bill is very similar to language around the steering committees for teacher evaluation systems. Since those are working well, I thought it only made sense when crafting this bill to model what we know is already working.

What this bill is largely about is encouraging collaboration between all partners in public education – teachers and school employees, parents, school board and administrators. In fact, the current version of the bill requires this collaboration to happen – so everyone can hopefully feel safe returning to school.

I also realize many districts have done some version of what is proposed in this bill so I have a few suggestions for the Committee to consider:

- Given where we are, or hope we are, in this pandemic, I suggest we remove the emergency preamble and have the bill take effect on its regular course.
- Second, since many school districts have already done what is called for in the bill, in some form, I suggest we make this optional in that a health and safety committee must be convened if either the superintendent, the school board or the teachers or school employees request a health and safety committee be formed. I don't intend to disrupt areas where something similar has been done or is currently in place. Instead, the purpose is to encourage the collaboration in places where there have been problems or issues.

I thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.