

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF
LD 429, An Act To Protect the Health of Students and Educators by
Requiring the Establishment of Health and Safety Committees in
School Administrative Units

Nate Williams, Director of Collective Bargaining & Research
Maine Education Association
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

April 5, 2021

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

My name is Nate Williams, and I am the Director of Collective Bargaining and Research for the Maine Education Association (MEA) which represents 24,000 teachers, education support professionals, and retired educators across Maine.

I am here to testify in support of LD 429, An Act to Protect the Health of Students and Educators by Requiring the Establishment of Health and Safety Committees in School Administrative Units.

This bill would require school districts to create something that they should already have, a health and safety committee with representation from all stakeholders. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every part of our communities and families. Public health officials have stressed the importance of community action to reduce the spread of the coronavirus.¹ Some districts did establish such a committee, and where they did, there was a well-thought-out plan for this school year.

This bill would require districts to establish a health and safety committee with membership comprised of educators, administrators, board members, and parents – all the relevant stakeholders in a public school. Each of these groups plays a vital role in keeping our schools and communities safe, and each brings a unique point of view to the table. Education works best when it is collaborative in nature.² This bill would require that collaboration by ensuring representation on the committee for all groups that will be charged with carrying out whatever plans are implemented.

It is important to note that this bill does not mandate any particular outcome or standard that any plan must meet. It just ensures a representative committee structure that will ensure input from relevant groups essential to making the local plan successful. Local school districts will have the flexibility they need to adopt plans that fit the conditions and capabilities of their specific district.

¹ See *Implementation of Mitigation Strategies for Communities with Local COVID-19 Transmission*, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/community-mitigation.html>

² See *Why Collaboration is Vital to Creating Effective Schools*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2013/05/02/why-collaboration-is-vital-to-creating-effective-schools/>

Another important note, this committee is only mandated for the duration of the COVID-19 state of emergency as declared by the Governor. Once the state of emergency ends, the obligation to have this committee in place ends as well. However, it does not mandate that the committee be dissolved when the emergency declaration ends, and we hope that it will serve as a blueprint for further collaboration and cooperation between educators, administrators, board members, and parents on this and other issues going forward.

We believe that cooperation and collaboration are the key to surviving the current pandemic, and a model for successful public schools going forward. The pandemic has made us all realize that ongoing attention by all stakeholders regarding the health and safety conditions in our schools are important and deserve ongoing monitoring

For these reasons, MEA encourages you to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 429.