

Malory Otteson Shaughnessy

89 Conant Street, Westbrook, Maine 04092 • 207.400.1540 • malory.shaughnessy@gmail.com

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Testimony in Support of LD 1383, An Act To Limit Homework in Public Schools
Sponsored by Rep. Collings

Good morning Senator Rafferty and Representative Brennan, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Malory Shaughnessy and I am a resident of Westbrook. I am also the mother of four sons, now adults and having successfully come through our educational systems.

I am here to speak in support of LD 1383, An Act To Limit Homework in Public Schools. As a mother who spent 23 years of my life engaged in our public-school systems in some capacity as my sons worked their way through to graduation, I have some thoughts about the practice of homework.

My four sons had very different experiences in our school systems due to their differences in strengths and challenges. A couple of them were able to thrive and succeed and move on to college, energized by their learning experience and excited for the continuation of this into their college years. Their learning styles and strengths aligned well with the mainstream of teaching and the system of homework in their younger years, while cumbersome and limiting of their time out of doors for sports and engagement in creative activities such as music and theater, was not punitive in its impact and did not increase their stress levels.

However, for two of my sons, the process of homework in their early days (first grade through 6th grade) became a nightmare of struggle, lengthy hours, and serious stress. They had learning differences and did not fit into the basic molds -- and even with adaptations and some accommodations they struggled to complete assignments at home, taking far more time than they should have had to spend on this rather useless activity. Both were smart and could understand the concepts and show their knowledge verbally but could not easily work through what was often simply busy work.

Even given this difference between the homework impacts among my own children, they were lucky and had involved parents that could assist and support them through the struggles they encountered, who could give them the benefits of technology for voice dictation on a computer to aid in the struggles with dysgraphia (dysgraphia is a neurological disorder that generally appears when children are first learning to write), who could advocate in special education team meetings to make adaptations to reduce the stress and frustration they faced due to processing disabilities, etc.

Unfortunately, many children do not have these home supports, and when you add learning differences to the already inequitable impact of homework, you are creating nearly impossible hurdles to overcome for some of our most in need students.

In general homework is a basically inequitable process. While students growing up in more affluent homes are likely playing sports, participating in other recreational activities after school, having access to computers, or receiving assistance from parents or additional tutoring -- children in disadvantaged homes are more likely helping take care of siblings while their parents work, possibly dealing with an unstable home life, and without the access to technological aids. Adding homework into the mix is one more thing to deal with -- and if the student is struggling with special needs, the task of completing homework can be too much to consider at the end of an already long and stressful school day.

Many children also live in temporary housing such as motels or homeless shelters. While schools can provide low-income students with warmth, food, supplies, and a knowledgeable teacher, asking students to bring essential work home with them may remove those pillars of support from their educational process. Further, making in-class work dependent on progress made at home invites that stress into the classroom and diminishes the positive effect of those support structures that the school has put in place.

Through no fault of their own, many students have little, if any chance, of being successful with work sent home. In addition to not completing assigned work, they get another loud and clear message that they can't be successful in school.

While public education has often held up as the antidote to poverty, and as a great equalizer in our society, it is quite possible that the opposite is the case. An education that is dependent on homework, especially if it requires expensive technology, may actually reduce social equity.

Yet, today, it is not just the disadvantaged who suffer from the stressors that homework inflicts. A CNN article, ["Is Homework Making Your Child Sick?"](#), covered the issue of extreme pressure on children of the affluent and looked at the results of a study surveying more than 4,300 students from 10 high-performing public and private high schools in upper-middle-class California communities.

"The findings were troubling: Research showed that excessive homework is associated with high stress levels, physical health problems and lack of balance in children's lives; 56% of the students in the study cited homework as a primary stressor in their lives," according to the CNN story. "That children growing up in poverty are at-risk for a number of ailments is both intuitive and well-supported by research. More difficult to believe is the growing consensus that children on the other end of the spectrum, children raised in affluence, may also be at risk."

Given these factors, it makes sense to me to simply eradicate homework in the lower grades, when homework is dependent on factors external to the child of time, technology, assistance and support. Even autonomous projects can be completed in school hours in these years given time in a library or computer room with assistance of ed techs or librarians.

Thank you for considering my testimony. Please support this bill and its movement towards more equity within our public educational systems.