

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 474

AN ACT REGARDING SCHOOL DISCIPLINE FOR MAINE'S YOUNGEST CHILDREN

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Eileen King, deputy 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. 474.

Our members validate that an increasing number of students we are seeing in pre-K through first grade are coming to us with behavioral problems caused by their home situations. That certainly raised concerns for us when schools were closed during the pandemic.

The reality is not all children are getting the socialization and early learning skills needed to easily integrate into a classroom. We agree that since the home environment is part of the problem, children who are acting out should not receive suspension or expulsion from school as a remedy.

We are opposed to this bill because it would appear to prohibit even in-school suspension. There are times when removal of the child from the classroom either as a consequence of their actions or a way to limit disruption to other children's learning is appropriate, at least in the short-term.

We also question the prohibition against withholding recess as a way to modify behavior or at least help the child make a connection that actions have consequences. While we agree that may not be understood by the youngest children, we think withholding recess could be effective for some of the older children in the cohort created in the bill.

Because all children are different, we need flexibility to deal with behavior problems that are not only disrupting their learning, but the learning of others. We have to protect all our students, and in some cases that means keeping them separate.