

TESTIMONY

In support of

LD 474: “An Act Regarding School Discipline for Maine’s Youngest Children”

Grace Leavitt, President, Maine Education Association

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on
Education and Cultural Affairs
April 26th, 2021**

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

My name is Grace Leavitt. I am a Spanish teacher on leave from Greely High School while serving as President of the Maine Education Association. The MEA has nearly 24,000 members—faculty and staff in our pre-K-12 public schools, our institutions of higher education, and many dedicated retired educators.

I am writing on behalf of our members in support of LD 474: “An Act Regarding School Discipline for Maine’s Youngest Children”.

Since I am submitting this testimony the day following the hearing on LD 474, I have the advantage of having heard the testimony of others and can respond to some issues raised.

But first, I do want to point out that MEA testified at a hearing before your committee in the 129th Legislature in support of LD 2016 (nearly the same proposed legislation as LD 474). As we said then, withholding recess may at first glance seem like a suitable type of response to some inappropriate student behaviors, yet especially for our younger students, the break from the classroom and the chance for physical movement may be exactly what is needed for a student to cope in some situations and thus return to the classroom, once again ready to learn. In fact, numerous studies have shown just how important physical activity and unstructured play are for students to be able to learn their best.¹

As for the prohibition of suspension called for in LD 474, there is an apparent need, given the testimony already presented to the committee, for a clarification on what ‘suspension’ is. The example of a student who has behaved inappropriately who is not able, despite appropriate steps having been taken, to come back to the classroom who thus needs to leave school for the remainder of the day is deemed a suspension. Yet the school administration may well need that flexibility in some cases in order to do what is best for that student at that time as well as for the other students in the class. MEA believes that either clarification of this point or finding a way

to allow for this action to be taken if it should be necessary would be an appropriate modification to LD 474. MEA supported the passage of LD 1370 previously (An Act to Address Violent Behavior in the Classroom) because of the need to do what we can to ensure safe learning environments for all students as well as safe working conditions for educators. Thus if there is no alternative in some extreme situations such that a student not only is removed from a class but is also in need of leaving school for the rest of a school day, we would hope that the professional judgement of the educators involved could be trusted to have this action as a possible path to take, again, if and when it is truly needed, even in the case of working with young students.

With this point in mind, we urge your support of LD 474 and hope that there could be a slight modification made to allow some degree of flexibility.

Thank you for your time. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

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¹<https://www.health.harvard.edu/exercise-and-fitness/the-importance-of-recess>

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