

Leading the Way to Great Public Schools for Every Maine Student

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TESTIMONY

In support of

LD 1253 “An Act to Add a Faculty Member and Nonfaculty Staff Member to the Board of Trustees of the University of Maine System”

and

LD 1391 “An Act to Enhance the Educational Expertise and Knowledge of the Board of Trustees of the University of Maine System”

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on
Education and Cultural Affairs
April 27th, 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, National Board Certified, 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 speaking on behalf of our members in support of both LD 1253: "An Act to Add a Faculty Member and Nonfaculty Staff Member to the Board of Trustees of the University of Maine System" and LD 1391: "An Act to Enhance the Educational Expertise and Knowledge of the Board of Trustees of the University of Maine System".

The MEA knows that the best decisions are made when the voices of the educators who actually work with and support our students are included in the process. This has been especially evident this year during the pandemic when our K-12 districts that included all stakeholders were called together to consider and plan for all that needed to happen for our schools to be as safe as possible while still being able to continue instruction; where the voices of educators in all roles were included, the academic year has gone relatively well, considering we are still in the throes of a global pandemic.

The importance of educator voice in decisions made in the higher ed world is no less important, in fact, perhaps even more so. Whereas in K-12 districts, the members of school boards are also members of the communities where the schools are and thus are closer to what the districts are dealing with, for the University of Maine System, the Trustees on the Board may have much less

of a direct connection to the campuses and programs and the people who work in our universities. Having representatives from the faculty and the staff serve on the Board of Trustees would greatly enhance the information needed as important decisions are made, and would thus improve the outcome of those decisions, which in turn benefits our universities and the students they serve.

I likely do not need to remind you of the very poorly informed decision that the University of Maine System Board of Trustees made this past fall regarding the health insurance for retirees. Once the voices of many educators and retirees were at last heard, the decision was reversed. Had there been representatives from faculty and staff on the Board of Trustees, I have no doubt that there would have been better information shared prior to the decision that was taken; the outcome would surely have been a better one right from the start rather than incurring months of stress and worry for so many retirees.

There are so many issues where the perspectives of the people doing the work are invaluable in being able to best inform decisions and to understand the implications and the impact of actions taken by the Board of Trustees. Passage of this legislation will mean we are doing what is best for our students and will help to strengthen our university system, which is vital to our state.

We encourage you to support making the improvement to the Board of Trustees for the University of Maine System called for in these bills.

Thank you for your time. I am glad to answer any questions you may have.

Grace Leavitt
President, Maine Education Association

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