

## TESTIMONY REGARDING

### L.D. 1512

#### AN ACT TO CREATE THE OFFICE OF THE EDUCATION OMBUDSMAN AND TO ESTABLISH A COMMISSION TO STUDY THE CREATION OF A REPORTING AND RESPONSE SYSTEM TO ASSIST PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN ADDRESSING INCIDENTS OF BIAS, DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Steven Bailey, 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 regarding L.D. 1512. School superintendents were opposed to the bill and school boards were neither for nor against.

Our concern around L.D. 1512 is not about its intent, but rather its approach, which is top down. That is a serious concern because public schools, by their very nature, need to be responsive to the students, parents and communities they serve, while following state education law.

School Board members represent those interests. We often compare their role to that of legislators, who are voted in by their constituents to represent them in Augusta. We doubt any legislator here thinks an ombudsman would be a better advocate for the people back home than they are.

Yet this bill would create the Office of the Education Ombudsman for the entire state who could not possibly represent the interests of all schools at the local level. It also would be duplicative at the state level with the Department of Education and its commissioner.

Meeting the needs of all schools and students is a difficult job and requires experts in the many areas affected by education law. That expertise is provided by the DOE in what has become a very collaborative process.

The bill also calls for the DOE to establish a commission to study diversity, equity and inclusion in public schools and assist districts in supporting those who feel disenfranchised.

The MSBA and MSSA also has developed the Cultural Competence Institute to allow School Board members and superintendents to meet monthly to talk about creating a culture of inclusion for students and staff; recruit, hire and retain faculty of color; and, develop policy around those goals. A second session is being planned so we can offer the program to more school leaders.