

Dear Members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

I am writing to express my support for LD 257, An Act to Provide for a Later Starting Time for High Schools. I am a child and adolescent psychiatrist in Maine and this change will directly impact the patients and families that I serve in my community. This change is based on a growing body of research that has shown the benefits of later school start times for teenagers.

Studies have consistently found that teenagers, particularly those in middle and high school, are biologically wired to fall asleep later and wake up later. When schools start too early, it interferes with this natural sleep rhythm and causes sleep deprivation, which can have negative effects on their mental and physical health, as well as their academic performance.

Research has shown that later school start times are associated with increased sleep duration, improved academic performance, and improved mood and behavior in teenagers. For example, a study published in the Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine found that high school students who started school at 8:30am or later slept an average of 34 minutes longer per night and had better attendance and grades compared to students who started school at 7:30am.

In addition, later school start times have been found to reduce the risk of sleep-related problems such as drowsy driving, depression, and substance abuse. Furthermore, the American Academy of Pediatrics has officially recommended that middle and high schools start no earlier than 8:30am to align with the biological sleep patterns of adolescents and improve their health and well-being.

In conclusion, I strongly urge you to consider the evidence and support LD 257 to move high school start times back to 8:30am. This simple change has the potential to significantly improve the health and academic outcomes of our teenagers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Melissa Bowker-Kinley, MD