

TESTIMONY OF MATT BERNSTEIN

LD 1018 – Ought to Pass

**An Act to Increase the Membership of the State Board of Education and Review the Board's Responsibilities, Functions, and Staffing**

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

March 22, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Matt Bernstein, I am a resident of Portland and I am the 2023 Maine Teacher of the Year. In this testimony, I am speaking as a private citizen and not as a representative of any school, district, or organization.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in favor of LD #1018. I urge you to support this bill.

This bill is important to me because I believe that it is essential to have teacher voices in conversations and decisions about education policy because policy decisions so often play out at the classroom level and have such a profound impact on teachers and students in classrooms. Bringing in a current teacher would offer a new and valuable perspective to the board and would improve education in Maine.

In my current role as Maine Teacher of the Year, I had the privilege of speaking with the State Board at a recent workshop session. I remain grateful for the opportunity I was given to share some of my thoughts on teaching and learning and I was especially pleased that I had a chance to share the perspectives of my students on effective teaching and the things that they said were important to them within school environments. The board members and I were able to have a collaborative and productive conversation about how we can support both our students and our teachers. I left feeling inspired and energized about my work in the classroom and eager to continue striving to provide the most excellent education possible to all students in Maine. Furthermore, the conversation helped me reflect on my own practice and consider how I can continue to improve. This experience has further solidified my belief that connecting teachers with education policymakers is beneficial to all. When we bring teachers into the conversation, we end up with better policies, which leads to a more supportive and productive learning environment for teachers and students. Expanding the opportunity for these kinds of conversations by having a practicing teacher on the board for all meetings will only increase the great work that happens when teachers and education policymakers work together.

I wish to stress that I greatly admire and appreciate the board and think that the members are doing excellent work so this is not intended to take away from their work and their expertise. I simply think that a practicing teacher could add value to the already excellent work happening on the State Board. Furthermore, a teacher board member could represent the larger teacher community in Maine. This could offer other teachers a point person that they could contact on the board to share thoughts, ideas, and questions. Finally, I think having a teacher on the board communicates an important public message about listening to teachers, trusting our teachers, and viewing them as experts in their field.

For all these reasons, I think having a practicing teacher on the State Board would be an asset and would help improve education in Maine. I strongly urge the Committee to vote unanimously ought to pass.

Thank you for your time, for the opportunity to testify, and for considering this in your deliberations.