

TESTIMONY REGARDING

L.D. 1769

AN ACT CONCERNING STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCE EDUCATIONAL DISRUPTION DUE TO TEMPORARY OR PERMANENT CHANGES WHERE THEY LIVE

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. MSSA's legislative committee voted neither for nor against L.D. 1769 and MSBA's legislative committee voted to support L.D. 1769.

We completely support the need to help children experiencing education disruption due to homelessness, foster care placement, youth detention or the other circumstances that disrupt a student's life. These are our most vulnerable children, and they need support.

We are understanding more about the intended purpose of this bill. It would create and provide a position that had at one time been in the Department of Education. L.D. 1769 creates a DOE position to oversee disengaged, homeless youth and mostly provides alternatives for our most disengaged students. It would provide a contact person for schools to call and to whom they could seek connecting services for students who may be experiencing frequent school mobility. MSSA is concerned about the effectiveness of one person to be this contact person for the entire state, and the cost associated with the creation of the position. There had been one person at the state level and one person per county at one time, and that level of funding and staffing may be necessary in order for this effort to have the level of success that is desired. MSBA supports this effort as a starting point and is in favor of having a person at the state level with whom school staff can connect directly and not be lost trying to reach someone in DHHS or MDOE who may or may not know important information and resources that can be of assistance to school staff working to help these students who have had significant disruption.

The person hired at the Department of Education should create and maintain connections with the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Corrections and others and use these liaisons with the various departments mentioned in this bill to assist these students. Their respective department heads or their assistants most certainly should be talking to each other and if not, we suggest this bill be amended to make that happen. We further suggest the bill call for a date certain when a plan will emerge, and out of that plan could come enabling legislation to require the various agencies to cooperate in support of our children.

While MSSA restates its position neither for nor against, MSBA urges you to vote OTP on L.D. 1769.