



Maine Education Association

Grace Leavitt President | Jesse Hargrove Vice President | Beth French Treasurer
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

Testimony

Neither For Nor Against

LD 2120:

John Kosinski, Government Relations Director, Maine Education Association

Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

January 31st, 2024

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan other esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

I am Jan Kosinski, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Maine Education Association (MEA) neither for nor against LD 2120, *An Act to Fund the Delivery of Educational Services to Children with Special Needs as Required by State and Federal Law in Special Purpose Private Preschools*. The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators in nearly every public school in the state.

Our concern about this bill has little to do with the merits of the bill and instead we have concerns about process.

As you are no doubt aware, we have been consistently concerned about the workforce shortages impacting public schools and the effect these shortages have on student learning and development. I have shared with the Committee the research report the MEA put together to help underscore the problem and to highlight the solution. You can find that report here: [Raise-the-Pay-for-Maine-FINAL.pdf \(maineea.org\)](#)

Last session, we saw proposals including a bill similar to LD 2120 funded through the Appropriations process but sadly other bills and proposals to address (or even attempt to address) the compensation for school employees were not funded. We simply cannot support this same process playing out again this year. And the dynamics are the same. Sadly, an increase in the minimum teacher salary as contained in LD 1064 and an increase in the minimum wage for ed techs and other support staff as contained in LD 974 are not in the Governor's supplemental budget proposal. This is unfortunate, especially after staff from the Governor's office committed to action on educator compensation during the last round of budget negotiations in June and July of last year. Yet the Governor's proposal contains no action on addressing the shortages schools face.

35 Community Drive, Augusta, ME 04330 | 1349 Broadway, Bangor, ME 04401
7 Hatch Drive, Suite 220, Caribou, ME 04736 | 29 Christopher Toppi Drive, South Portland ME 04106

207-622-5866 | 207-888-2070 fax | www.mainea.org



Maine Education Association

Grace Leavitt President | Jesse Hargrove Vice President | Beth French Treasurer
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

LD 2120 calls for an appropriation of \$15 million to help special purpose private preschools. That \$15 million can and should provide a downpayment for lifting teacher salaries or increasing minimum wages for ed techs and other support staff. In fact, the fiscal note for the minimum teacher salary proposal is a mere \$3.5 million in the first year to provide supplements to school districts to help get teachers to the new minimum. In fact, according to the fiscal note on LD 1064, the \$15 million called for in LD 2120 would pay all the upfront costs for an increase in the minimum teacher salary from the current \$40,000 to \$50,000. (I would like to provide a similar analysis for LD 974 to increase the minimum wage for school support staff, but we are awaiting further information from the Department of Education regarding the cost of increasing the minimum wage for all school support staff).

When bills such as LD 2120 are passed by this Committee and passed by the House and the Senate, they are sent to the Special Appropriations Table and are pitted against all the other priorities and needs on the table. While the proposal in LD 2120 will certainly help special purpose private schools and the students they serve, and while we are concerned with ensuring all students have the supports they need, we are also concerned about our current legislative process that pits this idea against other proposals. And for that reason, we ask this Committee to exercise great caution before proceeding to pass bills like LD 2120 without seeing an increase in the compensation for teachers, ed techs and all the other people who work in our public schools. We see that the shortages are intensifying and the research points to the critical role compensation plays in the recruitment and retention of skilled educators.

We hope this Legislature can find a way to do both. But without action on compensation, and even with various efforts by this Committee to alter standards to encourage more to enter our schools as teachers, ed techs, bus drivers and other critical roles in our schools, we are simply concerned that we may find proposals such as LD 2120 funded over bills that we think are necessary to the functioning of our public schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I am more than happy to answer any question you may have.