

Ilonka Deaton
Jaco Booyens Ministries TX
LD 1222

Written Testimony of Ilonka Deaton
In Support of An Act to Limit Sovereign Immunity for Schools and
Chairperson, Members of the Committee:

My name is Ilonka Deaton. I am a survivor of child sex trafficking within the music industry, a national advocate for child protection, a curriculum developer for schools and mental health professionals, and a consultant to multiple states on human trafficking policy and prevention. I have testified before legislative bodies across the country to strengthen child protection laws, and I speak to you today in strong support of this important and overdue bill.

An Act to Limit Sovereign Immunity for Schools and School Superintendents is not just another piece of legislation—it is a necessary line in the sand. For far too long, systems that are supposed to protect children have hidden behind a legal shield, allowing gross negligence, willful misconduct, and even criminal behavior to persist without accountability. This bill removes that shield, making it clear that negligence and misconduct in our schools will not be tolerated or ignored.

As someone who has worked closely with survivors, educators, and policymakers, I can tell you that many students suffer silently—bullied, abused, neglected, or discriminated against—while those in power either look the other way or fail to act. The trauma inflicted in those years is not confined to the classroom; it follows these children into adulthood, damaging their mental health, relationships, and opportunities.

Under current Maine law, school superintendents and districts can claim sovereign immunity even when students are harmed due to negligence or failure to act on known dangers. This bill would change that. It establishes:

Clear liability for willful misconduct and failure to protect students.

Mandatory reporting policies for all school administrative units.

A requirement for liability insurance to ensure victims are not left with no path to justice.

A fair 60-day notice period for resolution before legal action—respecting due process while preserving students' rights.

This bill does not punish good teachers or staff—it protects them. It rightly focuses accountability where it belongs: with leadership and systems that fail to act when harm occurs. As someone who trains teachers and school boards across the nation, I can say unequivocally: good educators want this accountability. They want safe environments for their students, and they want bad actors removed.

I urge you to stand with the students of Maine. Stand with the survivors. And send a clear message to every parent: your child's safety matters more than protecting a bureaucracy from liability.

Please vote yes on this bill. Thank you for your commitment to the truth, to transparency, and most of all—to our children.

Sincerely,
Ilonka Deaton
Advocate | Educator | Survivor