



# YARMOUTH SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

*Empowering all students*

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Maine Legislature  
Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Andrew Dolloff, and I am the Superintendent of Schools in Yarmouth, testifying in opposition to LD 1222.

Student safety – at school, at home, and in any setting – is of paramount importance today – as it has been throughout my 41-year career in Maine public schools. Having served as a teacher, coach, athletic director, high school principal, and – for the past 16 years – as a superintendent of schools, I can attest to the fact that student well-being is a daily concern in Maine schools and a constant topic of discussion in each of the districts in which I have worked.

In my four decades of working in Maine schools, the number of professionals who came to the profession for anything other than truly honorable reasons is incredibly minute, and virtually all of them understand and take seriously the need to keep kids safe.

From that position, I find that LD 1222 is a puzzling piece of legislation that causes one to ponder, “What is the motivation for such legislation?”

As things currently stand, a school leader in Maine who violates state or federal law, fails to ensure student safety, fails to report abuse, neglect, or threats to a student, or participates in willful misconduct or criminal activity is likely to be fired and forced to yield their professional certificate and will possibly face criminal charges. Additionally, they have opened the school district up to potentially devastating lawsuits.

When inappropriate actions are committed, local school boards, law enforcement officials, and the Maine Department of Education can and do act swiftly. With the loss of a career and possible criminal penalties looming over the heads of school officials who act in violation of the law – and the potential for significant financial awards being made to the unfortunate victims of such actions – it appears proper mechanisms are in place to both prevent such actions and to compensate the victims when injustices occur.

The practical impact of this legislation is that we will continue to see more consistent turnover in superintendencies and a decline in the candidate pool for those positions, exacerbating an already growing problem.



Earlier in my career, I served as the high school principal in part of Senator Carney's district. In the 16 years since I left Scarborough, they have had seven superintendents. Next door to my current position in Yarmouth, in Representative Kuhn's district of Falmouth, they are conducting their second superintendent search in the past three years. Even in two highly-regarded, well-paying districts like Scarborough and Falmouth, hiring and retaining school leaders is not easy. This legislation will make it infinitely harder, if not impossible.

I don't write today for myself. Fortunately, I will reach full retirement age three days prior to this proposed legislation taking effect, so I have the option to leave the profession without worry (though this legislation would solidify that decision). I write for my younger colleagues who will be placed squarely in the crosshairs during a time of increasing legislative uncertainty, and I write for communities that require strong, experienced leadership to provide their students with high-quality educational programming.

Additionally, I write for communities that may be in transition, seeking an interim superintendent due to the loss of a permanent school leader. Those communities often look to recently retired superintendents to guide them through a critical year in their history. With this legislation, the likelihood of finding such an individual will drop from "unlikely" to "not a chance." Why would recently retired veteran leaders risk their life savings, their homes, and any other assets they have acquired through a lifetime of service to Maine's schools for another year of headaches, conflict, and sleepless nights? That pool of candidates will not become shallow; it will become non-existent.

Lastly, I question the motivation for this legislation. Why are superintendents the only individuals singled out to be removed from protection under the Maine Tort Claims Act? This seems to be a vindictive bill resulting from a personal vendetta – clearly not the most purposeful or productive way to enact legislation.

This is a bad bill for Maine's schools, its school leaders, and its communities, and I encourage you to defeat it with great haste.

Sincerely,



Andrew Dolloff, Ph.D.  
Superintendent of Schools  
Yarmouth