

## TESTIMONY NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST

L.D. 1877

## AN ACT TO INCREASE PENALTIES FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING OFFENSES

May 12, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Judiciary Committee, I am Steven Bailey, the Executive Director of the Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and the Maine School Superintendents Association neither for nor against L.D. 1877, An Act to Increase Penalties for Human Trafficking Offenses.

Our associations appreciate the goals of these bills to protect young people and schools, but we have questions regarding the cost of such a burden, the additional training requirements on school staff, and whether there is proper capacity to administer such training.

In recent years, the state and many Maine school districts have prioritized this sort of training to better equip our staff to respond to child exploitation and abuse. The Maine School Safety Center has offered trainings on human trafficking, protecting young people from online exploitation, and combating child sexual abuse and trafficking. These have been important resources benefiting teachers and administrators.

Our associations appreciate that L.D. 1877 appears to take this issue seriously as it pertains to schools by increasing penalties for violations that occur close to our school buildings.

However, as written, MSSA and MSBA cannot support the requirement that every teacher, principal, school board member and ed tech “complete a human trafficking awareness program of at least 2 hours once every 2 years.” School staff are already required to participate in many training programs each year, from Freedom of Access to concussions. This would add an additional training program every two years, adding costs on to school districts and cutting into the precious time educators have at the beginning of each school year to plan for the year with their fellow staff.

In addition, the bill mandates these programs “must be presented by a nonprofit organization specializing in human trafficking investigations and victim assistance.” This would appear to be a very narrow definition for who could offer training, and we also question the capacity of such an organization to provide meaningful training to every teacher, ed tech, school board member, etc. across Maine. We would suggest looking at other, alternative approaches without such stringent requirements.