

TESTIMONY

In support of

LD 358: “An Act to Protect Workers from Unsafe Working Conditions with Regard to Indoor Temperatures”

Grace Leavitt, President, Maine Education Association

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on
Labor and Housing
February 22nd, 2021**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Sylvester, and esteemed members of the Committee on Labor and Housing,

My name is Grace Leavitt. I am a Spanish teacher on leave from Greely High School while serving as President of the Maine Education Association. The MEA has nearly 24,000 members—faculty and staff in our pre-K-12 public schools, our institutions of higher education, and many dedicated retired educators.

I am presenting testimony on behalf of our members in support of LD 358: “An Act to Protect Workers from Unsafe Working Conditions with Regard to Indoor Temperatures”.

I realize that this bill was probably submitted with workers other than educators in mind. And at first MEA was not going to weigh in on this. Educators tend to have a ‘make do’ attitude—it has been the norm for so long that many of the buildings we work in—and that our students learn in—are not ‘state of the art’ in so many ways, that we tend to shrug off the fact that in many spaces it is uncomfortably cold (though only from November to March!) and in many spaces it is way too hot (from May to June and again late August to early October) for optimal teaching and learning conditions.

It might be difficult to claim that such conditions are ‘unsafe’ in the sense of presenting a clear and present danger, but they certainly are not ‘healthful’.

The pandemic has helped to shed a brighter light on the poor state of many of our school facilities—in particular the inadequate ventilation, especially in terms of dealing with the aerosolization of the virus. It is all too evident that after years of insufficient funding for our

schools, such things as infrastructure have not received the attention that is warranted. To attempt to improve the situation right now for better ventilation, some teachers have been keeping windows open, even during the recent very low temperatures. It was a conversation with one of these teachers that reminded me just how cold the rooms I have taught in often were (though I was not keeping the windows open in February!), which then reminded me how at other times of the year, students would be melting in the heat (despite the three fans I brought in). I would get complaints from students, pleading with me not to keep the room so cold (or hot), since they seemed to think I had control over it!

Again, educators tend to just put up with such conditions and forge ahead—but really, don't our students—and educators—deserve better conditions in all of our schools? Comfortable, well-maintained, and SAFE classrooms have an impact on how well educators can teach and work, and how well students can learn. This also can have an effect on students' attitudes toward school and learning in general.

Perhaps these conditions won't be able to be addressed immediately everywhere that they exist, but it would help to have this in statute to ensure that we move in the right direction, instead of continuing to just make do.

We urge your support of LD 358.

Thank you for your time. Please contact me with any questions.

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