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TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 555

AN ACT TO EXPAND THE RIGHTS OF PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester and members of the Labor and Housing Committee. I am Steven Bailey, executive director of Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association in opposition to L.D. 555.

School Board members and superintendents do not understand why this bill is back again and believe parents and taxpayers won't understand that either. After two years of Covid-related school shutdowns, which were a particular hardship on working parents, families want their children back in school.

We applaud teachers, support staff and administrators for their work during this unprecedented time and know it has not been easy to juggle in-person teaching with online instruction. The dedication of all involved in public education during the health crisis is commendable.

What we need now is stability – something this legislation does not provide.

A teacher strike would create chaos and uncertainty.

It is undisputable that strikes severely disrupt the education of children and the lives of their families. A strike would break the bond of trust we believe most teachers work very hard to create.

As a state we passed legislation that raised the minimum teacher salary, and it will hit \$40,000 in July of this year. While it was the right thing to do, it escalates wage scales and that has the greatest impact on our poorest counties. Districts also provide comprehensive health insurance, sold by the Maine Education Association Benefits Trust, providing some of the best health benefits in the state.

So what are we striking for?

We believe the right to strike is a national movement that doesn't have a place in Maine. What is happening in Chicago has little relevance to what is happening in public schools here. The only similarity is the impact a strike would have on Maine students. They would be the losers.

We urge you to defeat this bill and with that action send the message to families and students across the state that they are the first priority in Augusta.