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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE
An Act To Require Education and Training Regarding Media Literacy for Legislators and
Legislative Staff
L.D. 1199

April 21, 2021

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government:

My name is Chris Kessler, and I represent House District 32, which is a part of South Portland and part of Cape Elizabeth. I am here to introduce LD 1199, An Act To Require Education and Training Regarding Media Literacy for Legislators and Legislative Staff. I do so with great sensitivity and caution.

If there is one thing that has plagued our nation besides COVID-19, it is the spread of misinformation and disinformation. It has majorly influenced our public dialogue, fueling discord and tearing at the fabric of our families, friendships, and democracy itself. It is being used as a weapon against us by foreign and domestic adversaries. As a nation, we seem to be having a hard time coming to grips with what is true and what is false, and that same problem creeps into our state politics.

I have introduced a bill that seeks for Democrats and Republicans to come together on one thing – if we cannot come to an agreement on a particular issue, we should at least agree on the ground rules of how to determine what is fact vs. what is opinion, and how to identify misinformation or disinformation. We as Legislators are disproportionately exposed to media trying to influence us to take one position or another. People spend millions of dollars trying to change our opinions in order to affect public policy for the people of Maine. The public record illustrates that Legislators are not immune to these efforts.

This bill requires that legislators and their staff receive education and training on media and information literacy, with a particular focus on identifying misinformation and disinformation. This curriculum would be developed by the Legislative Council; Democrats and Republicans, together. This is envisioned to be provided to legislators at the beginning of each session along with ethics, FOIA, and sexual harassment trainings.

I hope that this bill will lead to a robust and productive discussion about truth, the state of our politics, and the need to equip us with the tools to navigate an increasingly complex information landscape. I would be glad to answer any questions.

[District 32: South Portland \(part\) and Cape Elizabeth \(part\)](#)