

## **TESTIMONY**

In Support of

### **LD 1677: An Act To Support Frontline Workers by Adding a Temporary Tax Bracket Affecting High Earners**

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Before the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation

**May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

Senator Chipman, Representative Terry and other esteemed members of the Taxation Committee,

My name is John Kosinski, and I am here on behalf of the Maine Education Association (MEA) in support of LD 1677, An Act To Support Frontline Workers by Adding a Temporary Tax Bracket Affecting High Earners.

First, we feel compelled to make something clear. The federal and state support for public education over the course of this pandemic has been unprecedented. President Joe Biden's American Rescue Plan, passed by Congress in March, is designed to send over \$400 million to schools in Maine to help them weather this pandemic. Just yesterday, Governor Mills announced her historic budget proposal to finally fund our public schools with the 55% state contribution the voters demanded in 2004 and then again in 2016. These efforts do not go unnoticed or unappreciated. Right now, our schools need all the support they can get. There is no manual for how to run a public school system during a pandemic. And there is no cookbook recipe all educators can follow to help students emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic – both in their learning and in their overall development. Educators will face new challenges as things get “back to normal,” and the state and federal funding will help public schools in nearly every community.

LD 1677 is an attempt to reinstate the 3% tax surcharge for a different purpose – to provide financial support for the front-line workers who have helped us all during this pandemic. The grocery workers, the teachers and educators, the bus drivers – all the people who had to overcome any fears and go to work to keep our basic economy functioning and to provide basic needs for people. LD 1677 would reward the valiant health care workers who day in and day out cared for patients battling a virus we are still trying to understand.

Quite a bit of lip service is paid to these workers, the front-line workers. LD 1677 goes beyond lip service. It recognizes the front-line workers in this state, many of which are underpaid for their work, including teachers and educators, by providing grants to recognize their bravery and service.

At the beginning of the current school year, there was a lot of fear and anxiety from educators. Many of us at the MEA took calls from members concerned about their own health and the ability to maintain the safety requirements. Many of the calls and communications I had with educators focused on their fear for a loved one they live with catching the virus if they brought it home from school. These conversations were tough. Many were riddled with an uneasy tension – a desire to get back to school and with their students, while also anxious about the virus and their ability to control its spread.

By all accounts, our public schools have done an amazing job of remaining open, providing as much in-person learning to students as possible, while controlling the spread of the virus. School-based transmission of the virus has been particularly low in schools, and this is due in great part because of the great work educators are doing in our schools to abide by the safety requirements of the Maine Centers for Disease Control and the Maine Department of Education. I wish we could say that this was the case everywhere, but it is not. But this is the case in most schools across the state. Educators have overcome their anxiety and figured how best to operate a public school system during a pandemic.

This bill sends appreciation to all the frontline workers who helped us all during this pandemic.

For these reasons, the MEA supports LD 1677.

Thank you for your service to the people of Maine and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.