



Maine Education Association

Grace Leavitt President | Jesse Hargrove Vice President | Beth French Treasurer
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1129

**Testimony
In Opposition to**

- ~~LD 1189~~ An Act to Enact the Curriculum Transparency Act and**
- ~~LD 1196~~ An Act to Require Public Schools to Allow Parents and Guardians to Opt Out Their Children with Respect to Portions of the Curriculum and**
- ~~LD 1199~~ An Act to Provide Transparency in Public School Curricula and**
- ~~LD 1518~~ An Act Regarding the Rights of Parents to Withdraw Their Children from Public School Classes or Activities That Include Certain Controversial Viewpoints and**
- ~~LD 1589~~ Resolve, Directing the Department of Education to Adopt Rules Prohibiting Teachers in Public Schools from Engaging in Political, Ideological and Religious Advocacy in the Classroom and**
- ~~LD 1643~~ An Act Regarding Instructional Materials, Surveys, Analyses, Evaluations and Events at Public Schools and**
- ~~LD 1800~~ An Act Regarding Parental Rights in Education**

**Grace Leavitt, President, Maine Education Association
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
May 10, 2023**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Grace Leavitt. My pronouns are she, her, hers. I am serving as President of the Maine Education Association while on leave from teaching Spanish in MSAD 51. I have over 43 years of classroom teaching experience with 20 years as a National Board Certified teacher. The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators in our Maine system of public education in pre-K-12 schools as well as in our institutions of higher education, both the University of Maine System and the Maine Community College System, along with students in teacher prep programs as well as many retired educators.

I am testifying on behalf of MEA in strong opposition to:

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- ~~LD 1189~~ An Act to Enact the Curriculum Transparency Act,
- ~~LD 1196~~ An Act to Require Public Schools to Allow Parents and Guardians to Opt Out Their Children with Respect to Portions of the Curriculum,
- ~~LD 1199~~ An Act to Provide Transparency in Public School Curricula,
- ~~LD 1518~~ An Act Regarding the Rights of Parents to Withdraw Their Children from Public School Classes or Activities That Include Certain Controversial Viewpoints,
- ~~LD 1589~~ Resolve, Directing the Department of Education to Adopt Rules Prohibiting Teachers in Public Schools from Engaging in Political, Ideological and Religious Advocacy in the Classroom,
- ~~LD 1643~~ An Act Regarding Instructional Materials, Surveys, Analyses, Evaluations and Events at Public Schools,
- ~~LD 1800~~ An Act Regarding Parental Rights in Education.

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It is difficult to know where to begin to explain our opposition to all of these bills. Some seem to be solutions in search of problems—problems that simply do not exist. Some are clearly aimed at dividing parents and educators and creating an ‘us vs. them’ situation which will be detrimental to our students and to public education and runs counter to efforts on the part of educators to work with parents in order to have them support their students’ learning. Some call for unreasonable rules that must be complied with, that may well be impossible to comply with, or a school district or an educator will be at risk for severe consequences. They all stoke a mistrust in professional, trained educators, educators who care deeply about their students, who dedicate endless hours to teaching and supporting students’ learning, who continue their own learning to ensure they employ the best teaching practices and provide a welcoming environment in which all students can learn. Some would severely restrict the ability of a teacher to adapt a lesson or a unit to meet the needs of students or to include an unanticipated topic that organically arises from students’ interests and class discussion or incorporate newly found materials throughout the school year that would benefit and enhance students’ learning (materials often paid for with educators’ own dollars).

A few specifics:

For a district to attempt to comply with what is called for in LD 1129 I envision needing at least two full time staff, along with additional resources. I question if what is called for would also at least in part be in violation of copyright laws and/or agreements or contracts with those who provide training and professional development.

Districts have policies to address what is called for in LD 1196 though I question when there has been a situation where an educator ‘compelled’ a child to ‘adopt a viewpoint’ and I think it would be difficult to be aware of what all parents’ viewpoints were on...what exactly? On everything?

LD 1199--Curriculum is readily available—on school websites, in syllabi that are distributed—though as a teacher I would never have lesson plans prepared for the full year in advance, as I would need to be able to have the flexibility to adapt to students’ needs, to changes in schedules, to new ideas that may occur to me or that I may learn as the year progresses that will improve my practice—no, writing lesson plans is how I spend my weekends as a teacher. And I would not care to publish all tests for review for what I should think are obvious reasons.

I have to wonder what the genesis of LD 1518 is. I am aware of a lot of disinformation that has circulated so I am guessing that is the source.

LD 1589—again, districts have policies. There are of course times when controversial issues are discussed—students are encouraged to share their views, to think critically, to listen to one another, to engage in civil discourse. And MEA and NEA have professional codes of ethics—no need to ‘request’ that we adopt one.

I also wonder what the genesis of LD 1643 and LD 1800 are. MEA supports community schools, schools with ‘wraparound services’ and/or a coordinator who helps families access needed services, all to help meet students’ health and other needs so that they can best focus on academic learning.

Overall these proposed bills seem to be aimed at a particular political agenda, not at what will help students learn. This seems especially ironic, given that several speak to keeping politics out of public education.

They will, at best, have a severe chilling effect on teaching, will create a climate of fear, one in which something I say or a student says might be taken out of the context of the full conversation, misconstrued. They would have educators and school personnel spend more time and energy on needless tasks than on teaching and supporting students. They all further threaten to undermine and damage the professionalism of educators. Most importantly, the measures called for in these bills would clearly and definitely make it even more difficult, perhaps impossible, to encourage more to enter the profession, or to remain in it—all at a time that so many are working to recruit and retain dedicated teachers and staff and striving to lift the profession.

Numerous surveys have shown that the vast majority of parents **do** trust educators, and they agree on what we all—educators, communities, legislators--should be focusing on to provide what our students need—that our schools be safe places for all students to learn, and that schools have the staff and resources to support all students, especially the additional supports students who struggle may need and the resources and services to meet their mental health needs.

We strongly urge you to vote 'ought not to pass' on all of these bills, and to focus on what will really help students be successful and will support the educators who teach and work with them.

I am glad to answer any questions you may have.

Grace Leavitt
President, Maine Education Association