



MAINE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

49 Community Drive, Augusta, Maine 04330
Telephone: (207) 622-3473 Fax: (207) 626-2968
Website: www.msmaweb.com

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

L.D. 311

AN ACT TO IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AT PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Robert Hasson, deputy executive director of Maine School Management Association, and am here to testify on behalf of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association in support of L.D. 311.

This bill would allow local School Boards to decide to lower the mandatory attendance age for public schools in their district to age 5. It is aimed at getting more children into kindergarten and giving schools leverage with parents when a child is truant. Under the current law, there is nothing schools can do under truancy regulations when a child enrolled in kindergarten misses class.

We understand that lowering the required attendance age is a big change in the law. The key is that it is a local decision. Any School Board considering this option will hear from parents and the community, and weigh issues of parental control and costs.

That said, all districts are required to offer kindergarten, at least on a part-time basis, and most offer full-day programs. Research shows that kindergarten, at a minimum, is an essential foundation for the rest of a child's public school education. It only makes sense to give local School Boards an option to make it mandatory. Why wouldn't we take an existing resource and leverage it for all young students?

We also are hearing anecdotally that truancy at this level is a big problem for students already enrolled. Allowing that truancy to go unchecked could lead to bad habits for both students and parents and cause problems throughout a child's time in public school. Early learning is essential and learning that part of the battle is showing up is a valuable lesson.