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TO: Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

FROM: MPA Legislative Committee

SUBJECT: Opposing LD 468: An Act To Provide for a Later Starting Time for High Schools

DATE: March 1, 2017

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Dick Durost and I am the executive director of the Maine Principals' Association representing more than 840 PreK-12 principals and assistant principals of public and private schools of Maine.

We speak in opposition to LD 468, An Act To Provide for a Later Starting Time for High Schools. We understand and respect the Sponsor's concern for the issue at hand. We do not dispute research that suggests that later start times for high school age students may better reflect the sleep patterns of teenage students. But we also suggest that voluntary decisions regarding when high school students choose to go to bed is also a mitigating factor. Delaying the start time of school may have an adverse effect on student decisions to stay up even later the night before.

Our opposition to this bill is for multiple reasons. First, we believe there will be a significant, negative financial impact on school districts that presently operate single bus runs to pick up all K-12 students. This is especially true for smaller rural school systems and more than half of the high schools in Maine have less than 380 students. Some students presently ride on buses for an hour before and an hour after school. There will be a huge fiscal note attached to this bill if many districts are required to add separate bus runs for high school students only.

Secondly, the alternative to separate bus runs is to revise the start and end times for elementary and middle schools to cause them to begin and end later in order to coincide with the later high school start times. These younger students, especially elementary students, have much earlier established bedtimes and wakeup times than do high school students. To potentially affect younger students' body rhythms might inadvertently cause a greater negative impact on those younger students than the present impact on the older students.

Thirdly, many smaller school systems share facilities, staff, cafeterias, etc., across grade level schools. This bill could cause staffing and contract issues. Often, bus drivers will double as custodians and unless all students are delayed to a later start time, an inordinate amount of those staff members' work day will be spent driving buses and not doing necessary custodial and maintenance duties. The alternative is increased staffing or overtime

We also believe this bill to be one that infringes on local control. Establishing mandated later start and stop times for high school may have a much different impact on large city schools (Portland, Auburn, Lewiston, or Bangor) vs medium or smaller, more rural schools (Jackman, Fort Fairfield, Calais, Howland, Presque Isle, etc.). To establish a one size fits all model does not take into account the differences across the state.

We assume this proposal would have a corresponding impact on CTE schools as well. In many systems across the state, CTE students come to their local high school first and are then bused to the CTE school, often more than a half hour each way. We believe this will create an additional set of circumstances to address.

Finally, we would be remiss if we did not address an additional concern, not as important as those listed above -- but still extremely important to most high school students. This issue is the impact on co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. 50,000 Maine high school students (counting multiple participations) are active in before and after-school activities and athletics.

Most high schools presently begin the academic day sometime between 7:30 and 8:00 am and end the academic day between 2:00 and 2:30 pm. The typical time between opening and closing is 6.5 hours. This bill would move those times forward to an 8:30 start and a 3:00 pm or later closure.

Requiring that extracurricular activities not start after 7:30 pm will create issues. Also, we assume that no club or class meetings, activities (such as music or drama) or athletic practices could occur prior to 8:30 am. This could be particularly problematic for ice hockey practices that almost always revolve around the availability of early morning or evening ice time.

Schools are hesitant to release athletic teams traveling to away games prior to the end of the school day, although sometimes with long trips it has to occur. Typical start time for fall and spring games is presently 4:00 pm. This bill would require start times of 4:30 to 5:00 pm. Particularly in the fall, nightfall comes early. There would be significant issues in the completion of varsity games, and almost no opportunity for junior varsity games that often follow. The vast majority of high schools do not have fields with lights.

There will be winter concerns as well. There are huge scheduling issues for indoor facilities including gymnasiums. To accommodate practices and games for girls and boys; varsity, JV, frosh and first teams; basketball, cheer, wrestling, and unified basketball --- all often in a single gym or practice facility --- will severely test the ability to provide quality experiences for student athletes. For some schools, many road trips are 30 minutes or less. But for rural schools in most parts of the state, it is not unusual to travel 90 minutes or more to and from a game.

We highly encourage individual communities to have this conversation and, where it is supported and can be accommodated, we urge those schools to delay their start time..

Due to the fiscal implications as well as impact on K-8 students, staffing, transportation, and co-curricular and extra-curricular activities we are opposed to LD 468 and urge the committee to vote unanimous Ought Not To Pass.