

## MAINE CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION

Against LD 1056

### An Act To Require Local Voter Approval for Charter Schools

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Sponsored by: Representative Chenette

Date: April 1, 2013

My name is Jana Lapoint, Chair of the Maine Charter School Commission, and I am here today representing the Commission to oppose LD 1056 An Act To Require Local Voter Approval for Charter Schools.

This bill requires that any Maine Charter School Commission authorized public charter school must receive voter approval from all of the municipalities from which the public charter school would recruit students. The bill is a complete departure of fairness and equity for all students. For most charter schools the catchment area can be as far reaching as the entire State as the arrangement is for MEANS. For other charter schools, the catchment could be as many as 20 - 25 communities. This would mean that even if there are no students from a particular town interested in attending the Charter School, that prior approval would still need to be acquired or the school could not be approved. Let's examine another possibility - Take the three towns of Dayton, Saco and Old Orchard - If all three towns had to have a majority vote to permit the charter school, the lowest population town of Dayton could vote no and keep the larger communities with higher populations to lose out on the school. This would be before you even know if anyone from Dayton would want to attend just because they are in the catchment area. When the minority can overrule the majority, this is not democracy. Also, after the opening year, if the charter school did not fill its seats and opened the school to anyone outside the catchment area, would this mean without a vote of that town those students could never attend?

For a potential Charter School to reach into all the towns within the catchment area by holding a public meeting to receive input from the community and to explain what the charter school is all about is a very good idea. This could easily be accomplished in the process of our RFP and would not have to be legislated.

Additionally, the approval process would add a great deal of work for the Commission, the municipal officers, the election process and would be an unnecessary burden to the prospective applicant of a Charter School.

As you are aware, the RFP and the application process are lengthy and costly to a charter school. It takes many months of hard work for a charter to be ready for review by our commission and we don't see how this bill would be in the best interest of our students or their parents.

Thank you for your time today. I am willing to answer any questions you have and will be available for work sessions on this bill.