



MAINE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

L.D. #1056

AN ACT TO REQUIRE LOCAL VOTER APPROVAL FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS

Senator Millett, Representative MacDonald and members of the Education Committee, I am Sandra MacArthur, deputy executive director of the Maine School Management Association. I am here to testify on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association in support of L.D. #1056.

We support this bill because it requires public input into the charter approval process that does not exist today. This is appropriate for several reasons.

First it allows local taxpayers to weigh in on whether a proposed charter school is needed or wanted in the communities from which it hopes to draw students. Taxpayers deserve that vote since they will be supporting the school, whether or not they send their children to it.

Requiring a vote also means those hoping to open a charter school have to do the necessary outreach to win public support. This will help assure that when a charter school opens in a region, it does so because a majority of people believe it has educational value.

And, finally, this bill simply makes the process fairer and more democratic. Regular public schools have to ask voters every year to approve their budgets – budgets that are put together by a publicly elected school board. Charter school boards are not elected, but appointed by charter operators, and their budgets don't have to be approved through budget validation referendums. This bill would at least give voters a say in what is built in their communities before a charter school starts spending public funds.