

LD 1056

Good afternoon Senator Millett, Representative MacDonald, and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee.

My name is Lois Kilby-Chesley. I am a National Board certified teacher from Durham who is on leave from RSU 5 to serve as the President of the Maine Education Association.

I am here today to speak on behalf of the MEA in support of LD 1056 "An Act to Require Local Voter Approval for Charter Schools."

As we have seen in the recent situation in Portland at the Baxter Academy, charter schools need transparent oversight, and would benefit from local community support before opening.

Local schools, school districts and voters are left with the ramifications of the impact of charter schools. Voters in particular should have a voice in the decision of whether or not a charter school takes up residence in their community and impacts the taxes received and distributed by the local school district.

Presently the Charter School Commission determines whether a charter school is approved. Citizens may give input at the hearing but the Commission is under no obligation to include local voter voices in any final decision.

Again the Baxter Academy is an example of the failure of this process. Despite concerns from community leaders, educators, citizens and the media the Baxter Academy continues to move forward under the direction of private donors and a privately held Board of Directors. Neither the Commission nor the Academy have sufficiently dispelled the concerns that have been raised.

This bill would help to make sure that local voices are heard in the charter school process and gives final authority to those who are affected - the voters.

If local schools are impacted, including through the loss of funding, local voters should have a voice in determining if a charter school opens in their community.

Thank you for the chance to speak. I am happy to take any questions.