

MAINE TEACHER OF THE YEAR

February 16, 2022

Dear Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee,

My name is Kelsey Stoyanova, and I am writing to you as the 2022 Maine Teacher of the Year and a current classroom teacher to express my support for LD 1939 An Act To Protect School Administration Officials from Harassment and Abuse.

Education is currently experiencing what is being named “The Great Resignation.” Highly esteemed educators with years of experience in PK-12 classrooms are leaving, or considering leaving the classroom, due to myriad factors, one of which being the verbal and written torment they are being subjected to at the local, state, and national levels. This, added to the emotional toll caused by continued challenges of teaching and living in a global pandemic in schools that are drastically understaffed, is contributing to an ongoing crisis. In a survey conducted in January 2022 by the National Education Association (NEA), which represents over 3 million educators nationwide, 55% of educators who responded plan to leave the profession earlier than originally intended, and 88% of members reported seeing more colleagues leaving the profession or retiring early since the start of the pandemic. This is alarming, but the passing of this bill would support current and future educators, alleviating fear and anxiety that could be contributing to this exodus. In times like these, the education of our young people and their teachers should be at the forefront of the minds of our state leaders.

I have spent considerable time dedicating myself to professional preparation in the classroom, having obtained my B.S. in secondary education, my M.Ed in literacy education, and currently finishing my Ed.S in educational leadership. In October 2021 I was named the 2022 Maine Teacher of the Year, an incredible honor when nominated by my own students that has allowed me the platform to be a vocal advocate for students and educators in Maine. Since then, I have been subject to verbal and written targeting behavior that has impacted me personally and professionally. For the first time, I considered leaving the profession that I have fully invested myself into. On local radio, in print, and even on national television, my first and last name has been used in attempts to discredit my knowledge and practice in the profession and damage my reputation by spreading misinformation and hyperbole around my philosophy of education and what occurs in my classroom.

If it is not enough to explain what has occurred to me personally, the domino effect and how my experience has impacted others, including students, teachers, and administration in my district should further persuade you as to the importance of this bill passing. Having to deal with the attempts to discredit me and my practice has taken significant time that I would normally spend on other classroom

obligations, has instilled fear in educators across the state that have heard what is being wrongfully projected about me and others, and has taken an immense amount of time of administrators in my district and surrounding districts to manage these situations.

As an employee of a public school whose information is easily accessible, the right to privacy is lessened by my profession. This is further true in my even more public role as Maine Teacher of the Year. Prior to these experiences, I have not had to worry about escalations as a result of the continued utilization of my name and position. As a public school teacher and advocate for education, I should not have to worry about this, just like as government officials, you should not have to worry about this. In both instances, we are working passionately to help people, be it citizens or students, thrive.

Further, there are protocols and systems in place to ensure that teachers are effective. These include supervision and evaluation systems, curriculum that adheres to state mandated standards, district goals and initiatives, frequent classroom observations, collegial coaching, and professional development opportunities. Those protocols and systems need to be respected. For educators to be frequently called into question in a way that is not only not open to professional dialogue but also repeatedly and loudly undermines their expertise should not be tolerated.

In my role as Maine Teacher of the Year it is important that I represent the voices of teachers from across our state, and I will use that position today to say that without the support that the passing of this bill would provide to educational professionals, the state of Maine will continue to face a teacher shortage that will not be filled by potential candidates because those numbers are shrinking too. The best people to promote and amplify the teaching profession are teachers themselves, and with them leaving, there will be no one left to speak to the power of education. Please do not let this be the reality of education in our state. Please show your support of educators today and vote ought to pass on LD 1939 An Act To Protect School Administration Officials from Harassment and Abuse.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelsey Stoyanova". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "K".

Kelsey Stoyanova