

May 9, 2023

LD 1129	An Act to Enact the Curriculum Transparency Act
LD 1199	An Act to Provide Transparency in Public School Curricula
LD 1196	An Act to Require Public Schools to Allow Parents and Guardians to Opt Out Their Children with Respect to Portions of the Curriculum
LD 1518	An Act Regarding the Rights of Parents to Withdraw Their Children from Public School Classes or Activities That Include Certain Controversial Viewpoints
LD 1589	Resolve, Directing the Department of Education to Adopt Rules Prohibiting Teachers in Public Schools from Engaging in Political, Ideological and Religious Advocacy in the Classroom
LD 1643	An Act Regarding Instructional Materials, Surveys, Analyses, Evaluations and Events at Public Schools
LD 1800	An Act Regarding Parental Rights in Education

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in opposition to the above-named slate of proposed legislation. My name is Chris McLaughlin, and I am a licensed clinical social worker with over 22 years of experience providing behavioral health services to children and families across a variety of treatment settings here in Maine. I am also humbled to be the Executive Director of the Maine Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW-ME). A large part of my job at NASW-ME is to represent the interests of Maine's social workers as they endeavor to meet the behavioral health needs of Maine people across all settings and ages from Fort Kent to York and all places in between. On behalf of our over 1,000 members here in Maine, I'm honored to share thoughts on this important proposed legislation.

NASW has been following similar pieces of legislation such as the above-named LD's that have been proposed in other states across the country. Sadly, we have watched as communities all over the United States have been further divided and conflicted as these bills have perpetuated the narrative of "schools bad, parents good". While on the surface, the titles of these bills appear to support parents and their rights (implying that parents do not already possess numerous legal protections in our state), critics of these sorts of bills have argued that these "Parental Bill of Rights" bills could be harmful for several reasons, such as:

1. **Undermining the autonomy of schools:** These bills may give parents excessive influence over educational content and teaching methods, undermining the expertise and training of educators and administrators.
2. **Limiting diversity and inclusiveness:** These bills could be used to suppress the teaching of topics related to race, gender, and LGBTQ+ issues, which will result in a less inclusive educational environment and hinder students' understanding of diverse perspectives. By limiting discussions of diversity and inclusion, these bills will also negatively impact the concept of representation within the school environment, which disproportionately affects students from historically marginalized communities.
3. **Eroding privacy rights:** Often times, these bills include provisions that allow parents to access their children's records without their consent, potentially violating privacy rights and causing harm to students, especially in cases of abuse or neglect in the home.
4. **Interference with evidence-based education:** The bills may enable parents to object to or opt their children out of evidence-based curricula, such as comprehensive sex education or climate change education, which could lead to a less informed and less prepared student population.

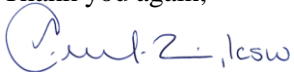
5. Infringing on the rights of LGBTQ+ students: In many states, we have seen that these bills allow parents to prevent their children from accessing resources, support, or counseling related to LGBTQ+ issues, potentially exacerbating mental health challenges and contributing to a hostile school environment.

6. Reducing access to healthcare: Some bills give parents the right to withhold consent for their children to receive certain medical treatments or counseling services at school, potentially limiting access to crucial healthcare and mental health resources.

NASW-ME believes that, whenever possible, parents, families, and guardians should be involved at all levels with their child(ren)'s education. Good communication and collaboration between schools and families are essential for student success and outcomes. With that said, NASW-ME further believes that we must allow school teachers, administrators, librarians, curriculum coordinators, and social workers and school counselors to do what they have been trained to do, which is to educate youth. Sadly, bills such as the ones presented before you today have only served to undermine public faith and confidence in our country's educational system and have contributed to the rhetoric that is further dividing communities across the nation. All one needs to do is look at communities such as Woodland Park, Colorado, Newburg, Oregon, Lafayette, Indiana, and in states such as Utah, Wyoming, Texas, Florida, Kansas, and Georgia. We cannot allow this same pattern to take root in Maine. It's time that we stand with our educational system and provide it with the tools it needs to continue its commitment to Maine's students. If parents are interested in becoming more involved in their child's education, we suggest sending a courteous email or picking up the phone to simply ask their child's teachers or building administrators for more information and, equally as important, how they as parents can get more engaged in the activities of the school. These bills proposed before you today are both unnecessary and, frankly, offensive to the highly competent and dedicated educators of Maine. Parents already have multiple opportunities to provide feedback in a more formal manner to their local school districts through public comment at School Board meetings and "open door" policies employed at most schools in Maine. NASW-ME supports legislation intended to bring groups of people together in productive conversation and to work towards common ground solutions, as opposed to legislation, such as these bills before you today, which seek to further divide, fuel conflict, and seed doubt and discontent in those institutions we need to trust most right now.

I would urge this committee to vote "ought not to pass" on these above-named bills. I want to thank you all for your work on this issue. Please do not hesitate to reach out to NASW-ME for any support we can offer, including any social work representation and participation in any future work sessions for these bills.

Thank you again,



Chris McLaughlin, MSW, LCSW  
Executive Director  
Maine Chapter – NASW

For additional information:

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/woodland-park-colorado-school-board-conservatives-rcna83311>

<https://www.koin.com/news/education/newberg-school-board-fires-superintendent-joe-morelock/?ipid=promo-link-block2>

<https://19thnews.org/2022/03/parental-rights-bills-teachers/>