



Senator Millett, Representative Kornfield and other esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is John Kosinski and I am here on behalf of the Maine Education Association to testify in support of LD 307, An Act To Limit the Number of Charter Schools in Maine, and opposed to LD 438, An Act To Allow the Creation of New Innovative School Models by Removing the Cap on Authorized Charter Schools.

The MEA is not opposed to charter schools. However, we have concerns about the development of charter schools in Maine and their impact on students and community schools, and we have had these concerns since the enabling legislation allowing charters passed in 2011. LD 307 is a basic compromise that does not disturb the charters currently in operation. In fact, if anything, this bill encourages the Charter Commission to work with the charter schools to maximize their potential.

When charter schools were authorized in Maine in 2011, some legislators promised these new schools would outperform public schools. In fact, the law even went so far to codify this sentiment by claiming charters will "improve pupil learning by creating more high-quality schools with high standards for pupil performance . . ." (Title 20-A, Section 2402) The promise that charter schools would outperform public schools simply has not proven true in all cases.

In past testimony before this Committee I have analyzed the standardized test score data and compared it to the nearby sending public schools. I am not going to do that today. We are keenly aware of the pitfalls of using standardized testing to evaluate schools. It is a flawed metric, for certain.

But when two of the nine charter schools in Maine are in the bottom five in performance on the English Language Arts section of the state assessment, I hope that would cause even the most pro charter among us to question whether these charters are living up to the promised standards of performance. In fact, both Cornville Charter and Acadia Academy were the 4th and 5th worst performers in the entire state. At Acadia Academy, 21% of the students were proficient in English, while 22% of students that attend the Cornville Charter and took the MEAs were deemed proficient or above. The statewide average is 50%.

I heard, with my own ears, a member of the Charter Commission say during a public meeting, and I paraphrase, that it is not the job of the Charter Commission to worry about quality. Instead, this commissioner said the primary job was to provide more options to parents, and the parents would decide what is best for their child(ren). We worry this type of thinking has likely resulted in certain schools being approved and/or expanded, despite their performance.

And we know many of the current members of the Charter Commission and their staff. They are good people and we know they care deeply about their roles. But we also hear regularly about the current workload for the commissioners. Overseeing 9 charter schools, with the care and attention to detail that is necessary, is a huge job. We worry adding more charters, rather than working with the ones currently approved, will only result in less help for the current group of charters. Capping the charters

at 10 would allow the Charter Commission, and its members, to really focus on improving the charters currently in existence and would help these schools live up to their original promise.

Maine now spends \$30 million per year on charter schools. Given the investment our state is making in these schools the MEA feels it is in everyone's best interest to focus the attention squarely on the charters we currently have open, rather than continue to expand more schools. LD 307 would allow the Charter Commission to really focus its work on advancing the quality and performance of the current charters, especially given the limited capacity and resources of the Commission.

Lastly, I would add that LD 438 promises "innovative school models" but I would remind the Education Committee Maine already has a law, Title 20-A, Section 6212 and schools around the state can adopt innovative models and practices. What's more, our schools are already incubators of innovation, all around the state, and we expect this innovation will only expand with the new leadership at the Department of Education.

Thank you in advance and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.