

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 1860—AN ACT TO CREATE THE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY ACCOUNT PROGRAM

L.D. 1741—AN ACT TO PROMOTE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY THROUGH THE EDUCATIONAL CHOICE TAX CREDIT PROGRAM, ELIMINATING CERTAIN RESTRICTIONS ON CHARTER SCHOOLS AND VIRTUAL PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS, ALLOWING MORE ENTITIES TO AUTHORIZE CHARTER SCHOOLS AND CLARIFYING EDUCATIONAL POLICY ON IMMUNIZATION REQUIREMENTS

L.D. 1798—AN ACT TO SUPPORT SCHOOL CHOICE BY ESTABLISHING EMPOWERMENT SCHOLARSHIP ACCOUNTS

L.D. 1841—AN ACT TO ESTABLISH THE HOPE AND INCLUSION SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

L.D. 1838—AN ACT TO CREATE THE EMPOWERMENT SCHOLARSHIP ACCOUNT PROGRAM

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Eileen King, deputy executive director of Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association, in opposition to L.D. 1860, 1741, 1798, 1841, and 1838.

Private school vouchers can take many forms, but they all are designed to fund private schools with public dollars. Public schools serve all students, regardless of economic status, disability, religion, race, ethnicity, English fluency, sexual orientation, gender identity, immigration status, family status, or any other personal characteristic. Unlike private schools, which can pick and choose their students and often cater only to those who can afford tuition, public schools open their doors to all, free of charge.

Private school vouchers do not offer real choice. Vouchers give a choice to private schools, rather than parents and students. Voucher programs allow private schools to accept taxpayer dollars but still reject students with vouchers for a variety of reasons, ranging from disability to ability to pay. And even with vouchers, most parents still cannot afford the full cost of attending a private school or provide the transportation needed to get to the private school. In Maine, the average tuition for a private elementary school is \$15,000 and up to \$30,000 for tuition for a private high school. Therefore, low-income families are not fairly and equitably served by a voucher program as they can't afford the additional costs and fees that are associated with private schools.

Private voucher schools do not adequately serve students with disabilities, often failing to admit them or provide them the same quality and quantity of services available to students in public schools, including those mandated under each student's individualized education program (IEP).

Private school voucher programs talk about parent empowerment but have little to say about providing parents safeguards against fraud and incompetence. Nor are there protections in place for students whose parents fail to exercise good judgment.

Maine students deserve to attend schools that have highly qualified teachers where students of all backgrounds are accepted and appreciated. It is for these reasons that our associations oppose L.D. 1860, 1741, 1798, 1841, and 1838.