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LD 1089

Testimony in Opposition to LD 1089: “An Act Regarding the Authorization of Public Charter Schools”

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Nick Murray and I serve as director of policy for Maine Policy Institute. We are a free market think tank, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that advocates for individual liberty and economic

freedom in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on LD 1089.

This bill would allow the Commissioner of the Department of Education (DOE) to overrule a Maine Charter School Commission’s (MCSC) authorization of a new charter

school, if she determines that student health or academic well-being is at risk. As if there

are not enough hurdles to starting a charter school in Maine, this would be a way for activist bureaucrats to wield even more power over them.

An aspiring charter school could go through the entire authorization process in front of the commission, a process by which it is required to prove that it can provide for

the health and academic well-being of prospective students—a process in which DOE can

provide input as well. It can raise any alarms it sees at that time. After doing so, or even

never having done so, the head of the DOE could unilaterally squash a new charter school just authorized by the MCSC.

To think that this, in any way, provides for better educational outcomes for Maine students, or helps to ensure student health, is frankly laughable. This bill is an obvious attempt to further handcuff charter schools in this state, both present and future. It is profoundly out-of-touch to restrict opportunities for Maine children to find their best educational option, especially in the wake of the immense mental health and academic frustrations that students had to deal with for many years.

If students had more options than traditional district schools, maybe Maine students' national assessment scores wouldn't have dropped below the national average

for the first time in decades.¹ During the pandemic, charter schools, and especially virtual schools saw their waitlists balloon; clearly families desire other options.

Please deem LD 1089 “Ought Not To Pass” and reject these rank efforts to cripple any educational opportunities for Maine students outside of the public system. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2022/pdf/2023010ME4.pdf>

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