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Testimony of Senator Lisa Keim before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
**LD 1800, “An Act Regarding Parental Rights in Education”**  
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Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs I am Lisa Keim, and I proudly represent the citizens of Senate District 19, which includes Northern Oxford County and communities in Franklin County. I am here to present LD 1800, “An Act Regarding Parental Rights in Education.”

2021 has now become known as the year of the great Parent awakening, where engaged parents showed up en masse in school board meetings all across our country. Parents have become activated for varying reasons, such as delayed return to in-person learning, imposition of mask and vaccine mandates, and curriculum content that prior to the COVID virtual learning system had been happening behind brick walls. The reasons for dissatisfaction are plentiful enough that 55% of respondents to a 2022 Gallup poll started they were either “completely dissatisfied” or “somewhat dissatisfied” with the education system in the United States. These people are not wrong - schools are failing our children. If upon hearing this polling data, it seems unimportant because the ‘experts’ know best, and therefor deserve more credibility than these unknown poll respondents, that is a large part of the problem.

LD 1800 is meant to be responsive to the times, to the outcry of parents, and reaffirm proper authority - that it belongs with the parents.

Because, despite the plethora of reasons that children are not succeeding in school, there is one overarching reason parents are standing up: schools have gone too far in shifting the decision-making power dynamic, taking control away from parents and giving it to the education bureaucracy.

Research has shown, time and again, that the number one indicator of student success is parental involvement. Let me say that again in another way. Educational curricula, school administration, Maine DOE nor even the single best teacher you ever had have as much impact on a child’s success in school as their own parent.

Studies have consistently shown that effective schools, where students are learning and achieving despite often being in low social and economic neighborhoods, have strong and positive school-home relationships. All students are more likely to experience academic success if their home environment is supportive.

This bill is responsive to the shift that has taken place and seeks to reestablish that each parent has the fundamental right to make decisions regarding the upbringing, education and well-being of their own child. It also reaffirms that a parent is entitled to access all information regarding the school activities of their child. This includes a right to review all teaching or instructional materials, required textbooks,

course syllabi, lesson plans and other teaching aids used in the classroom of the parent's minor child, including while that parent's minor child is participating in virtual or remote learning.

And importantly, as this country is facing a mental health crisis, particularly among children and teens, this bill requires school administrative units to notify parents of certain activities relating to student health and well-being and to adopt procedures related to parental notification about, involvement in and addressing concerns about a student's mental, emotional or physical health or well-being.

This shouldn't be a controversial issue. Parents and taxpayers have a right to know what is being taught to the next generation. And parents need to know if their child is experiencing a crisis. Over the last couple of years, we have seen falling graduation rates, increased chronic absenteeism, plummeting test scores, huge jumps in mental health diagnoses, and other disturbing trends. Given these progressions, we need to seek greater parental and community involvement, not less.

Teachers and schools are an invaluable asset in providing for a child's education and future, however, they are contributors only. The overall wellbeing of child, in all his or her attributes, is the ultimate responsibility of the parent, and their role, their say in matters pertaining to their own child, has been reduced to almost inconsequential, and all too easily discarded. This must change.

Quality education is of paramount importance. Maine schools should be a place of collaboration - between parents and teachers, counselors and other school personnel, but parents must always be in the driver's seat; all are welcome at the table, but the CEO is the parent.

We need laws that reaffirms parents' fundamental rights, that places parents firmly in charge of the upbringing, education and well-being of their own child, while respecting and valuing the role of teachers and schools.

Nobody - no matter how expert their credentials may be - is more invested in a child's education and mental and physical health than a child's own parents.

Thank you for considering this important legislation. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.