

The Maine Heritage Policy Center Testimony to Support LD 1227

"An Act To Allow Parents To Apply to the Commissioner of Education To Enroll Their Children in a Receiving School Administrative Unit and To Remove Limitations on Which Students May Be So Enrolled"

Senator Millett, Representative Kornfield and distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Adam Crepeau and I serve as a policy analyst at The Maine Heritage Policy Center. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of LD 1227, a bill that would give parents, guardians and their children real school choice in Maine.

Sometimes the best bills are the simplest ones. LD 1227 would simply allow all parents or guardians to request a change in enrollment to another school administrative unit for any reason. Current statute limits requests to students who reside in a school administrative unit that neither maintains a school nor contracts for school privileges and is unable to find a school administrative unit willing to enroll the student. This expansion is not a heavy lift; it would just allow all parents to participate in the current process. If the request is approved, the school administrative unit where a student resides would be responsible for paying the student's tuition.

Make no mistake, this bill would help to ensure children receive the education they deserve. In 2018, only 71 percent of Americans were satisfied with their oldest child's education and merely 48 percent were satisfied with the quality of education in the United States overall.¹ While this was a nationwide survey, it illustrates the public's poor sentiment regarding K-12 education, and we should strive to make it more positive. We are confident LD 1227 would serve to alleviate parents' dissatisfaction with the education system in Maine.

The Maine Heritage Policy Center does not subscribe to the status quo; we too do not believe a child's zip code should determine the education they receive. Opponents of this legislation will claim this bill is merely a scheme to bolster privately-funded schools or non-traditional public schools. However, research from open enrollment in Colorado showed that traditional public schools are the most popular school choice option for students.² This legislation is necessary because it would make strides to improve the public education system in Maine.

The report regarding Colorado's open enrollment found that high-performing districts were more likely to attract students from outside the district.³ Some opponents will view this as harming their schools by decreasing enrollment numbers. If this is a concern, these school districts should utilize an introspective approach to become more attractive to students and their parents and guardians. This legislation would

¹ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/241652/seven-parents-satisfied-child-education.aspx>

² <http://readyeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/ODODfinal.pdf>

³ Ibid.

ultimately create universal school choice, creating much needed competition between school districts. If school districts are forced to become competitive, there may be more emphasis on establishing better outcomes for students. According to Erin Kane, the superintendent at Douglas County Schools in Colorado, “open enrollment keeps you on your toes. It forces you to be the best school district you can be, and forces your schools to be the best schools they can be.”⁴

Not to mention, this bill would make it easier for parents to send their children to a school that is tailored to their needs. While there are certainly merits to the traditional school system, this bill would ease the way for children to attend charter schools that are tailored to their needs. For example, the Baxter Academy of Science and Technology may be better suited for students interested in a career in a STEM field. Similarly, a parent may believe their school district is not doing enough to address bullying and may like to assign their child to another district. In other words, there are many reasons why students and their parents may want more school choice.

Lastly, the Cato Institute conducted a meta-analysis that included 19 studies on 11 school choice programs which concluded that increased school choice has statistically significant positive effects on student performance.⁵ Not only that, but school choice overwhelmingly benefits low income families. While wealthy families have the financial resources to purchase homes in areas with good schools, low-income families have to settle for the schools located in their zip code.⁶ This bill would allow families to send a request to their superintendent and subsequently the commissioner for a change in school district, which would allow low-income students to attend schools that are currently out of reach. After all, education plays an important role in alleviating poverty.⁷

Because parents and guardians should have the right to choose which school their child attends, The Maine Heritage Policy Center urges the committee to vote, “Ought to Pass” on LD 1227. Thank you.

⁴ <http://readyeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/ODODfinal.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.cato.org/blog/evidence-school-choice-works>

⁶ https://www.edchoice.org/school_choice_faqs/who-uses-school-choice-programs/

⁷ <https://prospect.org/article/education-cure-poverty>