

**The Maine Heritage Policy Center
Testimony to Oppose LD 714
“An Act To Prohibit Public Charter Schools from Expending
Funds for Advertising ”**

Senator Millett, Representative Kornfield and distinguished members of the Joint Standing 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 testify in opposition to LD 714.

This bill would prohibit public charter schools from paying for advertising through print, television, radio, yard signs, digital, or electronic media. The Maine Heritage Policy Center opposes this bill because it overtly and unnecessarily targets public charter schools, their teachers and the students they educate. Unless a family resides in one of the few Maine communities with school choice, students are essentially assigned to their local public school. While overall enrollment has declined, the supply of students to traditional public schools remains predictable and faces little competition from non-traditional education alternatives. Public charter schools do not have this luxury, thus they advertise to inform parents of their education options and to maintain enrollment.¹ We are also not opposed to traditional public schools advertising to families if everyone in Maine had school choice.

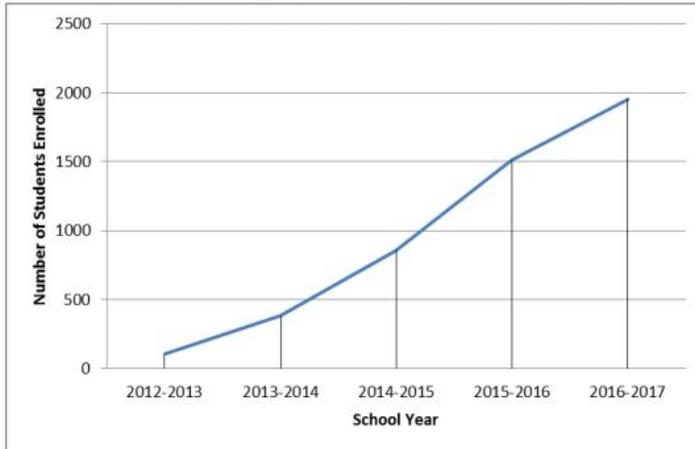
This legislation is little more than an attempt to diminish student enrollment in public charter schools. Public charters serve as an option for students and families with needs or interests that aren't well served by traditional public schools. This is not the fault of traditional public schools, but rather the reason why public charter schools exist in the first place. For students interested in a career in a STEM field, the Baxter Academy for Science and Technology may be the best fit for the education they wish to receive. Similarly, a student with a particular interest in marine sciences or forestry may be best served at the Harpswell Coastal Academy. By taking away all avenues for public charter schools to advertise, likely decreasing enrollment, this bill could significantly damage Maine's public charter school system and the education students receive at these institutions.

Advancing this bill would be a disservice to students and parents who do not know there are options available aside from traditional public schools. Parents may not be educated on their

¹ <https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/charter/commission/intro>

options if public charters cannot advertise - there are only nine schools approved to operate in the entire state.²

Charter School Enrollment by Year



Source: Maine Charter School Commission

Even if one prescribes to the Us vs. Them mentality when it comes to public charters and traditional public schools, approximately 2,200 of the state's 181,000 students attend public charter schools.³ While enrollment has increased as more schools have been approved to operate,⁴ public charters still pose little threat to the viability or health of Maine's traditional public

schools, and account for a miniscule proportion of all public school students. If parents choose to place their child(ren) in a public charter school instead of a traditional public school, they must perceive, or have experienced, concrete benefits to make or maintain this change. Therefore, it would be unwise to prohibit public charter schools from using their funds to advertise.

In sum, public charter schools should not be prohibited from advertising because it would hinder the success of these schools and Maine's overall public school system. To that end, The Maine Heritage Policy Center urges the committee to vote "Ought Not to Pass" on this bill. Thank you.

² <https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/charter>

³ <https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/Authorizer%20Annual%20Report%201.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.pressherald.com/2019/02/12/four-groups-intend-to-apply-for-last-charter-school-slot-in-maine/>