

May 6, 2011

Senator Langley, Representative Richardson and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

I am Yellow Light Breen, a business executive and the Chair of the Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education. I come here before you today to urge your support for LD **1422. An Act to Prepare Maine People for the Future Economy.**

The Coalition is a group constituted as a partnership of business and education leaders. We have been in existence since the early 1990s and have helped to develop and promote many policies aimed at improving the educational performance of Maine and of our schools and students. Our Members come from broad and varied backgrounds with one thing in common – a commitment to creating a high performing public education system in Maine. We hold firm to that commitment because we believe that Maine’s prosperity and economic vitality depends on it. A quality education is both a moral and economic imperative.

In May 2010 we launched the Prepare Maine initiative. Since then we developed an impressive cadre of Partners and Supporters, many of whom will be testifying here today as well. We are all part of what I think of as the ‘education orchestra’ – and your committee is a significant section of that orchestra. It is crucial for the sections of the orchestra to work together. Only by all of us – students, parents, educators, communities, businesses, policy leaders - working together are we going to create a true system of education that spans early childhood, K-12, higher and adult education and workforce development.

In my testimony earlier this session in support of the adoption of the Common Core Standards, I stated the transition to the Common Core Standards should not further delay putting forth **long term goals** for education in Maine and a **strategic plan to achieve the goals and a timeline for implementation**. LD 1422 calls for, among other things, such a plan and gives cause for all sections of the orchestra to come together to create a more effective system of education. We need to be thinking strategically and long range.

We put forth this proposed legislation as a means to strengthening the promise of Learning Results made to our citizens back in 1997 – the 118th Maine Legislature. After all these years, we still don’t have a truly coordinated system of education in Maine. There are too many “silos” and students and families are faced with navigating a system that is in constant flux. We need a plan that ensures a coordinated approach to education where all young children have access to high quality programs that advance their development; where Maine students graduate prepared for success beyond high school; and where many more Mainers complete a college degree or industry recognized credential.

Those following me will speak to specific elements in the bill. We fully realize that a strategic plan is not something available at the corner store – although we don’t have to start from scratch. There has been some good work done by UMS, MCCS and DOE with PK-20 from which we can build a vibrant plan. It will take a collaborative approach and we are willing and able to facilitate that work.

Further, there are other elements in LD 1422 that can and should be put in motion right away. Making a commitment to adopt a uniform process for kindergarten screening, global budgeting, a long overdue requirement of a standards based diploma and setting a clear timeline for the demonstration of proficiency in five content areas for the class of 2015 and the remaining content areas for the class of 2018 are doable and will make an immediate difference.

For that to happen, we need to challenge the status quo and be bold in our thinking. When are we going to say PERFORMANCE MATTERS? We have been talking about this for way too long. We must move off the dime and act decisively. We can't do this without your support.

As you consider this bill, we ask that you bear these fundamentals in mind: Education is critical to our long-term economic prospects and prosperity; to effective citizenship; and to our health.

- 80% of the current jobs – and 90% of the fastest growing jobs in the future -- in Maine require significant education and training beyond high school.
- Unemployment rates are lowest for those with the most education – and highest for those workers with the least education.
- Lifetime earnings of individuals increase predictably and dramatically with education levels.
- Economic development and site location specialists point most frequently to the availability of a skilled, educated, flexible workforce as crucial to business investment.

Maine must compete with other areas of the region – and the world – that are high(er)-cost but which are competing on the basis of value added, and most of all, based on the skill and education of the workforce we have.

There is much focus in public policy these days on three urgent challenges: Jobs, Energy, and Health Care. But we cannot have the jobs that we want – including high-skill, high-education, high-paying jobs in health care and sustainable energy sectors – without a superior education level that has Maine at the top of New England and the nation.

In short, we need to PREPARE MAINE for a stronger economy, better jobs and brighter future. We can start today.

We will be present for the worksession and happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

Yellow Light Breen, Chair
Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education