

MAINE COALITION FOR EXCELLENCE
IN EDUCATION

April 1, 2009

Sen. Justin Alford, Chair
Rep. Patricia Sutherland, Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
State House Station 100
Augusta Maine 04333

Re: Opposition to LD 977, *An Act To Repeal the School District Consolidation Laws*

Dear Senator Alford, Representative Sutherland and Education and Cultural Affairs Committee members:

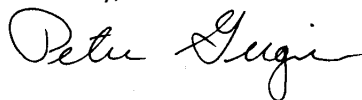
On behalf of the Executive Committee of the Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education I am submitting this as testimony in **opposition of LD 977**. Members of our organization come from broad and varied backgrounds with one thing in common – a commitment to creating a high performing public education system in Maine. We hold firm to that commitment because we believe that Maine's prosperity and economic vitality depends on it.

Members of the Coalition have testified before this committee many times over the years. We came before you in the first session of the 123rd with MCEE's "Guiding Principles" for district consolidation because we believed then (and still do) that district consolidation is necessary. The **status quo is unsustainable** and the principal objective of any district consolidation plan must be **improved student performance** and better educational opportunities for students.

After listening to the testimony yesterday from my office I want to commend you all for conducting the hearing in a professional and reasoned manner. However, I am disappointed that the notion of improving educational opportunities for "students" was not a theme of the comments. It should be our major focus. Quite simply, we must work toward a more **efficient and effective** way to deliver education. We have the information on Maine's demographics, the economy and educational trends. What is missing is the common sense of purpose. **The focus has to be on the ends to be achieved and not on the arguments about the means, turf and local control.**

We urge you to amend the district consolidation law but do not repeal. Repealing the law will further distract us from **student focused** education policy issues. Also, we must recognize that there are districts that have worked to form RSU's and their efforts should be recognized. I am convinced that your committee is more than capable of finding solutions to the correctable obstacles in this law. The Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education stands ready to assist. Please contact me or our Program Director, Dolly Sullivan at 469-3231 if you want more information.

Sincerely,



Peter Geiger

Chair
207-755-2246

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These following points represent the thoughtful and objective conversations we have had as a business education partnership among Board members and with critical friends. I want to share them with you. Best of luck in your deliberations.

- District consolidation is primarily about providing **better programs** and **richer opportunities** for **Maine students**. **Thinking differently about how we deliver a quality education is necessary.**
- Fewer, better structured and resourced districts will improve coordination, communication and result in a more **defined common purpose** that will improve learning opportunities and provide **equity** for all students and **tax relief for Maine citizens**.
- Administering and maintaining our current level of school districts is simply unsustainable given the economic environment in Maine. This point made even more prominent after the release earlier this week of that **Maine is facing an even larger revenue shortfall** than anticipated. Educational resources need to be used in a more effective and efficient way that produces better student learning.
- Maine has dodged two bullets in **TABOR and Palesky** – we simply can't take that risk again. We must emerge from this session with **amendments to the consolidation law** that set a path forward to a high performing education system and economic stability for Maine's taxpayers.
- We need to establish sound education policy on school governance. **"Maintaining local control"** is not a valid reason to maintain the status quo. A good plan will get local support because it means richer learning opportunities for Maine students.
- We have suggested in the past to limit the number of districts to around 80 – for pedagogical purposes and develop language that supports **collaboratives** that will result in even fewer back office functions for things like maintenance, transportation, collective bargaining, benefit administration, etc.
- A reasonable but firm **timeline** with a clear **strategy** is necessary and doable if groups and individuals put aside the political turf issues.
- District consolidation is the first step in **re-creating substantive education policy** in Maine.
- It has been nearly 12 years – **June 9, 1997** – since the **Learning Results** was signed into law. The **118th Legislature** passed the landmark legislation in **May 1997**.....here we are in 2009. **Maine students can't wait** any longer for us to get our acts together.

