

**Testimony in Support of Governor LePage's nominee for Education Commissioner,
Stephen Bowen
March 2, 2011**

Dear Chairman Langley, Chairman Richardson and the Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

I am Bob Kautz. Interim Executive Director for the Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education and I serve on the Board of Directors. I am here on behalf of the Coalition to support the nomination of Stephen Bowen to be Commissioner of Education.

The "Coalition", a business education partnership, has been around since 1990. Our members have testified before this committee many times on policy issues that impact public education in Maine. We remain committed to a high quality education system that prepares all learners for success in the 21st century. In May 2010, in partnership with many other organizations, we launched the *Prepare Maine* initiative – a call to action that will help Mainers understand how we can work together to remodel our education system, and how vital education is to our economy.

Members of our staff, leadership team and Board members have had several recent conversations with Mr. Bowen to discuss our Prepare Maine initiative and the education reform Blueprint. Based on those conversations, we are confident that with his experience and familiarity with Maine's education system as a student, classroom teacher, former legislator, and policy analyst, he can hit the ground running as Maine's next Education Commissioner. He is bright and articulate on the subject of education and most importantly, realizes the need for a plan for education in Maine and the connection between a quality education and Maine's economy.

Further, Mr. Bowen has a core understanding of the fundamentals of the learning process and public policy. We believe these skills, coupled with his energy and mature perspective is a good combination of qualities for anyone in this very important position.

In our conversations it was clear that Mr. Bowen supports standards based education, a performance based diploma, and the need for a long range plan for education with short and long term measurable and attainable goals. He also recognizes the importance of supporting educators with quality professional development opportunities. That resonates with our members as all are key elements of our Prepare Maine initiative and the long held mission of the Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education.

Further, we were encouraged to hear his plan to hold regional meetings and to take advantage of the good thinking of practitioners, particularly the Maine Teachers of the Year. Steve has spoken repeatedly about

building strong relationships in the field with superintendents, principals and teachers as well as with professional education organizations. He is committed to getting out of Augusta, to the communities and schools across Maine and to develop strong communication efforts. That collaborative approach will serve him well.

Steve is a strategic thinker with strength of character and courage to do what is right. He clearly understands the need to put together an effective and efficient team to handle the day-to-day operations in the Department so he can focus on improving student performance and the public policy that supports it. By winnowing down and prioritizing the multitude of initiatives that are currently on the books, the Department of Education can focus its energy as a resource for school districts.

It is time to stop tinkering around the edges of education reform in Maine. We don't have the benefit of time – too many youngsters enter school not ready for the experience, we are graduating too many students who don't meet basic proficiency standards and require remedial courses in college, and Maine lags behind in the number of citizens with a degree or industry credential. All of these factors have a direct impact on our ability to ensure a 21st Century qualified workforce.

Maine must have a vision and plan for education – one that transcends party affiliation, elected terms and education silos- and the wherewithal to stay the course. Absent that plan, we will continue to find Maine lagging behind other states in the economic prosperity that has eluded our state for too long. A quality education system that focuses on all learners from 'cradle to career' resulting in our students being among the best educated in the world is our ticket to economic prosperity. MCEE is committed to seeing that occur. We are confident Steve Bowen shares that vision and will work with us all to make it happen.

The Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education supports the nomination of Stephen Bowen as Maine's next Commissioner of Education, and we urge the Committee to recommend his confirmation.

Respectfully,



Robert Kautz, Interim Executive Director