

*Maine  
PTA  
Every child. one voice.*

5 May 2009

To the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

**In support of L.D. 1438 An Act to Permit Charter Schools in Maine.**

Senator Alfond, Representative Sutherland, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am Ginny Mott, a member of the Board and legislative chair of the Maine Parent Teacher Association. Maine PTA supports LD 1438.

National PTA and Maine PTA support educational choices within public schools because one of the most important things parents can do for their children is ensure that they receive the most appropriate education possible. Charter schools add to parents' ability to find an education appropriate for their child. We, also, expect charter schools to provide opportunities for parents to be included in meaningful decision-making roles.

This bill includes criteria we feel are critically important in establishing charter schools. Specifically that the schools:

- Be open to all students,
- Comply with federal and state laws governing public schools,
- Be accountable to local school boards in the districts where the schools are located, and
- Be funded fairly with respect to all Maine schools and students.

We appreciate that this bill calls for phasing in charter schools. This is wise to give us all time to learn and make adjustments as needed.

Charter schools add public school choice that introduces competition and competition's inherent benefits into the educational system without diverting taxpayers' money away from public education. This is good for children, families, and taxpayers because it creates expanded and improved educational opportunities while ensuring fairness to children and oversight of taxpayers' money.

Charter schools also offer expanded professional opportunities for teachers and other school personnel. This benefits both the staff members and the students with whom they work. People who are enriched by their work are better able to inspire their students.

We do have one concern with LD 1438: We are concerned that this bill only requires 50% of the teachers in a charter school to hold an appropriate teaching certificate. We recognize that a charter school organized around a particular theme may need to reach beyond currently available teaching professionals for people with sufficient content knowledge. However, 50% is a low number of professionally trained educators. We hope to see a greater proportion of certified teachers and a requirement that content-area experts receive appropriate training for their new role as teachers.

With the ability to organize around a theme, a special aspect of Maine or in response to the needs of specific student populations, charter schools will enrich the landscape of education in Maine.

On behalf of all Maine children, Maine PTA supports charter schools in Maine as this bill proposes.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

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