



## **Testimony for LD 1438 An Act to Permit Charter Schools in Maine**

May 5, 2009

Sen. Alford, Rep Sutherland, distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Roger Brainerd, a former teacher, administrator, technology integrator.

Currently I am the Board Chair of the Maine Association for Charter Schools.

LD 1438 is a comprehensive bill, built on the draft Model Bill created by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, reflecting 18 years of experience in the 40 other states with charter school legislation. Our Association has carefully tailored the provisions in LD 1438 to reflect the circumstances in Maine.

Because of the bill's length and complexity, we have developed a "table of contents" and a "highlights" paper that are included in the rainbow colored briefing book that we handed out.

I'd like to have you reflect on the experience and research that are the foundation of LD 1438. Opposition to charter schools in Maine and to charter schools across the US has been consistent for many years. Opponents typically represent organizations with interests in the current system of education.

Typical of the arguments against charter schools are the shallow "sound-bites" that charters "take resources away" from existing schools in public education, "When the federal funds run out, the state will have to pay from then on", and "charter schools will take the best students", or "the best teachers", etc.

These "sound bites" are "myths", and we ask you to look carefully where the arguments for or against charter schools are coming from. We are confident that you will find our support for charter schools is based on their potential, their experience, and their close scrutiny by independent researchers across the country. Fears of opponents are unfounded, based on misinformation and misunderstanding, and not on the provisions in LD 1438.

We feel LD 1438 is an exceptional bill that will not only enable charter schools in Maine, it will be the object of close attention at the national level when many states are working through problems created by their earlier legislation; and by the other 9 states that have waited before enacting charter school legislation.

The administration of President Obama is also watching Maine's charter school legislation. New charter schools will be eligible for up to \$450,000 each in start-up and planning grants. Furthermore, states have been told that their charter school program will be examined closely in the competition for stimulus funds. There are millions of dollars for public education in Maine at stake here.

One of the most important aspects of this bill is its emphasis on the role of authorizer. Research shows that quality charter schools need to be developed through a quality application and contracting process.

When LD 1438 becomes law, interest will be high but development of actual schools will be slow and deliberate. A school board or a college or university with a 4-year Education Program must first decide to be an Authorizer, and then seek the funding and training needed to assume their legal role.

When ready, Authorizers must issue a detailed "Request for Proposals" to potential charter school organizers (non-profit boards). What follows then is a detailed "Application Process" and finally a contracting or "Chartering Process" which is centered on a "Performance Framework": all this is detailed in this bill. When a new charter school is finally born (chartered), then the authorizer must carefully monitor and assess the school's academic and financial progress according to the indicators, measures, and metrics that were included in its charter.

We hope, as you study LD 1438, you will call on our organization if we may help you understand its complexity – and also its strength.

**Thank you**