

May 1, 2023

Testimony re: LD 618: “An Act to Eliminate Critical Race Theory, Social and Emotional Learning and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion from School Curricula” – OUGHT NOT TO PASS

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment in opposition to LD 618. My name is Chris McLaughlin, and I am a licensed clinical social worker with over 22 years of experience providing behavioral health services to children and families across a variety of treatment settings here in Maine. I am also humbled to be the Executive Director of the Maine Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW-ME). A large part of my job at NASW-ME is to represent the interests of Maine’s social workers as they endeavor to meet the behavioral health needs of Maine people across all settings and ages from Fort Kent to York and all places in between. On behalf of our over 1000 members here in Maine, including many school social workers, I’m honored to share thoughts on this important proposed legislation.

As social workers, NASW-ME supports any efforts to enhance a young person’s understanding of themselves as well as the world around them. Social Emotional Learning and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are among some of the best-practice strategies that educators can use to achieve this goal. These essential components of education are crucial to the success and well-being of all students, and it is imperative that they are given the attention they deserve.

Social emotional learning, or SEL, is the process of developing the skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, establish positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. By teaching SEL, we are equipping students with the tools they need to navigate the complex social and emotional challenges they will face throughout their lives. SEL helps students build resilience, develop empathy, and enhance their problem-solving abilities, making them better prepared to succeed in all aspects of their lives. Research shows that when schools focus on and promote SEL, students have more positive attitudes toward others, have a stronger sense of self, and perform better academically. Schools also see reduced behavioral issues, lower levels of distress, and higher graduation rates.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion, or DEI, is another critical component of a well-rounded education. Like some of the elements of SEL, by teaching about the value of diversity and promoting an inclusive environment in schools, we are preparing students to be successful in the diverse world they will encounter outside of the classroom. DEI education helps students develop an appreciation for different cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives, and promotes the development of a more just and equitable society. Equally as important, lessons on DEI promote the skills of empathy and perspective taking, two critical skills aligning well with youth outcomes with problem solving and conflict management.

Incorporating SEL and DEI into the school curriculum is not just a matter of academic success, but also a matter of social responsibility. By providing students with a well-rounded education that includes these critical components, we are building a foundation for a more equitable and just society. I urge you to support the inclusion of SEL and DEI in the school curriculum, so that we can ensure that all students have the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in today's world.

Regarding Critical Race Theory, or CRT, it’s important to note that NASW-ME has spoken with several of our school social work members and supporters and are unaware of instances of CRT being taught in any Maine K-12 school. However, we believe that it is important to include factual and accurate historical information in our schools’ history and social studies curriculums and to again stress the importance of teaching respect for diversity. To be clear, though, it is not our understanding, as LD 618 would have one believe, that students are being taught that one race or sex is inherently better than another, that one should feel a sense of discomfort or guilt because of their race or sex, or that specific traits are

racist of sexist. NASW-ME has great faith in the expertise of our state's educators in their ability to teach facts and address teachings of concepts such as implicit bias with respect for all learners in their classrooms.

I want to thank you all for your work on this issue. Please do not hesitate to reach out to NASW ME for any support we can offer, including any social work representation and participation in any future work sessions, should it be necessary, for LD 618.

Thank you again,



Chris McLaughlin, MSW, LCSW

Executive Director

Maine Chapter – NASW

**Resources:**

Catalano, R.F., Berglund, M.L., Ryan, J.A., Lonczak, H.S., & Hawkins, J.D. (2004). "Positive youth development in the United States: Research findings on evaluations of positive youth development programs." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 591(1), pp.98-124

Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D., & Schellinger, K.B. (2011). "The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions." *Child Development*, 82, pp.405-432

Merrell, K.W. & Gueldner, B.A. (2010). *Social and emotional learning in the classroom: Promoting mental health and academic success*. New York: Guilford Press.