

Karen Matso
Kittery Maine
LD 154

My name is Karen Matso and I live at 31 Goose Point, Kittery Point ME.

I plan to testify tomorrow at 1:00. Just in case I have technological difficulties tomorrow, I am writing in, in support of LD 154. I am a member of the Kittery School Committee, an educator who has worked in Kittery schools and currently, I deliver professional development in schools all over New England.

As a minimal receiver town, Kittery school district struggles to fund necessary supports for students. Student needs are growing, particularly in the area of social emotional health. To keep our students safe, and meet their emotional needs so that they can learn, we must expand our counseling and guidance personnel, and building leadership, resources for which, have been hard to find in our budget because of our minimal receivership status.

Our taxes are being raised each year to support our school system but many families in our community are lower income families that have inherited homes that they could no longer afford today. These families cannot afford the increased tax expenditures needed to provide for our children in schools.

Our school enrollment has largely stayed the same, keeping the state's formula for what Kittery should be able to contribute for our schools somewhat static while the needs of students has increased. Also, while we value all of our students from the naval shipyard, it is my understanding that the costs to educate those students is the same as all students but the reimbursement from the federal government that we get to support those students is less than what we gain from students not living in the shipyard.

Our FY 2024 school budget is \$21.2m. From what I understand, the Funding Formula calculates the Kittery school budget at \$13.4m or 63% of its actual budget. The calculated state contribution to our 21.2m dollar budget is \$1.7m or just 8.1% of the total budget. That leaves a very heavy burden on Kittery Tax payers. We have a very strong school committee and an involved community who cares about education. Our teachers are paid nearly at the bottom of the local pay scale and we are trying to rectify that but it is hard with our current budget constraints. We have just completed a very strong 10 year vision for Kittery schools and we hope to be able to fund the changes we'd like to see for our students and the school community.

Please pass this bill to help add needed funds to the Kittery school budget.