

TESTIMONY NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST

L.D. 210

AN ACT MAKING UNIFIED APPROPRIATIONS AND ALLOCATIONS FROM THE GENERAL FUND AND OTHER FUNDS FOR THE EXPENDITURES OF STATE GOVERNMENT AND CHANGING CERTAIN PROVISIONS OF THE LAW NECESSARY TO THE PROPER OPERATIONS OF STATE GOVERNMENT FOR THE FISCAL YEARS ENDING JUNE 30, 2025, JUNE 30, 2026 AND JUNE 30, 2027

February 7, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Rafferty and Representative Noonan Murphy, I am Robbie Feinberg, the director of communications and government relations for the Maine School Management Association.

I'm providing testimony on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Superintendents Association and Maine School Boards Association neither for nor against the preK-12 public education proposals contained in L.D. 210. While there are portions of L.D. 210 that superintendents and school boards support, there are many other aspects of the document that do not pertain directly to schools and education within the state, and therefore we cannot speak to the full scope of the proposed bill. Additionally, there are other aspects of funding Maine's schools that are not fully addressed in this bill, and we'd like to speak to these as well.

We thank Governor Mills for committing to Maine's state-mandated obligation of 55 percent of our state's public education costs. The legislature's continued investment has proven vital for our schools, particularly as federal COVID-era grant funding has come to an end. These investments have provided financial stability, helping to ensure that we can continue to support our staff and provide our students with the academic programming they deserve.

We are also thankful for continued state funding for universal free school meals. This policy has been truly transformative. Through your support, we have served millions more meals every year, ensuring that our students are fed and ready for learning every single day.

Yet even as the state has met its 55 percent share of state spending, our schools and educators continue to feel the strain of emerging needs. We are serving more students who are economically disadvantaged or homeless, requiring more funding for transportation, targeted academic instruction and social support services.

Special education costs have grown. We are committed and obligated to meet the needs of these students, which has meant hiring more staff, creating new programs or sending students to special-purpose private schools. The federal government has never met its obligation to cover 40 percent of special education costs, putting much of this funding burden on our state and local taxpayers.

In addition, our local schools continue to feel the effects of legislative mandates. And we still are struggling in other areas, such as school infrastructure, as many of our districts do not have the local resources to fully cover new construction or renovation. Added together, these factors have stretched the budgets of our local taxpayers, who have told us loud and clear that they cannot handle higher property taxes.

In the face of these challenges, our schools need robust state support to ensure we can continue to provide a rich educational experience to our students, while balancing the financial resources of our residents. We understand the difficult budget situation that our state faces, but we ask that you remember the fiscal impacts of your policies on our schools and our local taxpayers.

Again, we are so thankful for the legislature's continued support for our public schools, and we thank you for your commitment to provide an excellent education for every Maine child.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I am happy to take any questions you may have.