

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

L.D. 71

AN ACT REGARDING SPECIAL EDUCATION FUNDING

February 26, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Steven Bailey, the Executive Director for Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association in support of L.D. 71.

This measure would impact the growing number of Maine's 'minimum receiver' districts, which now comprise nearly one-third of the districts throughout our state.

Even though property valuation would make it appear that these communities can provide a robust education for their students without assistance through General Purpose Aid, residents of these communities know that is often not the case. Many live on fixed incomes or are considered economically disadvantaged, with little breathing room in their household budget. Increases to local property taxes affect these families hardest. Many struggle to afford groceries or their electric bills, let alone an additional local property tax increase.

One of the largest drivers of recent increases in school spending is special education. This is one area where the state does assist minimum receivers – at least partially. In 2004, when the legislature passed a bill mandating that the state would pay 55 percent of K-12 education, it also agreed to pay 100 percent of special education costs for minimum receivers. This has not occurred. While it began at 84% in 2005-2006 and continued there for three fiscal years, it bottomed out in 2011-2012 at 30%. It now stands at 50 percent.

That lack of promised state support has been felt especially hard in recent years, as special education costs have risen steadily, with more students needing one-on-one help or attending special-purpose private schools.

These districts need more state support to meet the growing needs of their student bodies. Increasing the minimum state share to 55 percent for minimum receivers would be a welcome step towards ensuring that these communities can provide robust support to every child while balancing the needs of their taxpayers.