



CITY OF BANGOR

Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Testimony in Support of LD 501 – “An Act to Fairly Fund School Administrative Units for Economically Disadvantaged Students”

Feb. 26, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Cara Pelletier, City Council Chair for the City of Bangor, and I am providing testimony in support of LD 501, “An Act to Fairly Fund School Administrative Units for Economically Disadvantaged Students.”

During the last school year, more than 64,000 Maine students were considered economically disadvantaged – amounting to 38 percent of all students across our state. In Bangor, 44.7% of all public school students received free or reduced lunch in May 2023. That percentage has increased to 51.6% in February 2025.

These are the children and families who’ve been hit hardest by the effects of the pandemic and the rising cost of living in recent years. Many struggle to meet basic needs, and when faced with a financial emergency, they’re forced to make impossible choices, like whether to make a car repair even if it means falling behind on rent and utilities.

Data has long shown that these struggles at home make it far more difficult for these children to make academic progress. In Maine, economically disadvantaged fourth-graders score nearly 20 points worse than their peers in reading, and nearly 25 points worse in math. Chronic absenteeism rates are higher. Fewer graduate and go to college.

Teachers, ed techs and principals work hard to assist these students. We have hired Title I specialists, social workers and mental health professionals. But there is limited funding to do this work.

Maine’s school funding formula already provides an additional 15% weight in its pupil count for each student in a district that is considered economically disadvantaged. LD 501 would increase that weight to 25%. Making this change would result in a more equitable distribution of resources to local school districts to provide services these students need.

This bill also would help align Maine’s funding formula with other states, many of which already have a greater student weight than ours. For instance, Connecticut has a 30% weight, South Carolina’s is 50 percent and Vermont’s is 103 percent.

When there’s a shortage of police officers, or a rising crime rate, we increase wages and hire more officers. When infrastructure is failing, we invest by paving roads, fixing bridges or improving water systems. But there remains a tendency to reduce funding that directly invests in our children. If we want to improve outcomes, we must invest to improve the skills and success of Maine’s future labor force.

On behalf of the Bangor City Council, our School Department and City residents, we urge you to pass LD 501 to ensure an elevated level of funding would directly support students and families who are most in need of it.

Cara Pelletier, City Council Chair, cara.pelletier@bangormaine.gov

Debbie Laurie, City Manager, debbie.laurie@bangormaine.gov