

TESTIMONY NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST

L.D. 1003

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AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE RETIREMENT BENEFIT IMPROVEMENT FUND

March 26, 2025

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and esteemed members of the Labor Committee, I am Steven Bailey, the executive director of the Maine School Boards Association, testifying on behalf of the MSBA Legislative Committee neither for nor against L.D. 1003, An Act Establishing the Retirement Benefit Improvement Fund.

Maine school board members commend the goals of this bill and feel it addresses an important issue: improving the purchasing power for retired state employees. This new fund, as described in the bill, could “increase by at least \$500 the portion of the retirement benefit in which cost-of-living adjustments are applied.”

This is badly needed. Our members know that educators who have retired from our school districts have not seen their pension benefits keep up with the rising cost-of-living, and this bill proposes a commonsense solution to use available fiscal resources to slowly chip away at this longstanding challenge. We also appreciate that the fund created in L.D. 1003 would not necessarily require ongoing funds, but would allow the legislature to use leftover funding, over time, to support this initiative.

Our members’ only concern with this bill is whether it should be a priority at a time when there is so much financial uncertainty. The state budget is much tighter than in previous years, and board members are deeply concerned about potential federal education cuts that could threaten school meals and extra support and programming for students in poverty.

These are serious threats that could harm our local school districts. While we think L.D. 1003 is a good idea in concept, we believe your committee, and the legislature as a whole, should prioritize other essential needs in our schools and communities.