

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

L.D. 363

AN ACT TO AUTHORIZE A GENERAL FUND BOND ISSUE TO CREATE THE SCHOOL
CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT FUND

April 17, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, I am Lee Schroeder and a member of the Cape Elizabeth School Board. I am testifying in support of L.D. 363 given its potential to assist in addressing the school facilities crisis that faces the State of Maine and negatively impacts the educational experiences of our students and educators.

As reported by various sources, the vast majority of Maine's 581 school buildings were built before 1990, including some buildings built more than 100 years ago. In Cape Elizabeth, the central portion of our current Middle School was built in 1934, more than 90 years ago, and all of our school buildings are more than 60 years old.

While the teachers and other education personnel are the centerpiece of the learning experience for our children, it is indisputable that the physical environment of a school impacts a student's learning opportunity. Leaking ceilings, rooms without natural light, and rooms with poor functioning climate control negatively impact a student's ability to learn and a teacher's ability to teach. Further, the evolution in thinking about the most constructive approach to learning, such as small group learning, requires a different type of space than what was designed when most of Maine's schools were built. And of course, the integration of technology into education creates new facilities requirements for optimal learning.

As evidenced by the consistent lack of State funds to meet fully the school requests for construction projects, the State has a significant challenge in ensuring that the school facilities are supporting every Maine student's educational experience.

In Cape Elizabeth, the community began working on a plan in 2017 to address what was identified as a major issue our aging school infrastructure. The costs of replacing school buildings continues to escalate, and Cape Elizabeth voters will vote for a third time in June 2025 to replace our Middle School, the oldest of our buildings. We support L.D. 363 because it

would improve State support for school construction projects by 1) increasing the amount of funding available from the State and 2) enable the State to fund more projects while still requiring local funding based on need. Given the magnitude of the challenge with Maine's aging school infrastructure, L.D. 363 will not solve all the issues but it is an important start in addressing the problem to the benefit of Maine's students and educators.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.