

## 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 Robbie Feinberg, the Director of Communications and Government Relations of the Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and the Maine School Superintendents Association in support of L.D. 363.

Maine is facing a school infrastructure crisis. More than 400 of our school buildings were built before 1990. Some were built more than 100 years ago. In the past few years, two school buildings were shuttered because they presented such severe health and safety risks to students and staff. We unfortunately know of dozens of other schools with roof leaks and other hazards in desperate need of repair.

We also know that state and local funding have not been sufficient to meet these needs. Local taxpayers cannot afford to take on more of a property tax burden. The state's Revolving Renovation Fund and School Construction Program have fixed infrastructure issues in some districts, but their resources are limited. In the last rating cycle for the School Construction program, only 9 new schools were approved out of 74 applications.

L.D. 363 would provide badly needed funding and begin to address years of deferred school maintenance.

Our associations are in strong support of the work of the Governor's Commission on School Construction, which was formed last year and is currently working to develop recommendations on how the state should address its school infrastructure needs.

Two recurring themes have emerged in these commission meetings: superintendents have shared the need for funding for "in-between projects" – between a renovation and the construction of an entirely new school – something like the building of just a new wing on a school building. Many school officials have also criticized the "all-or-nothing" setup of the School Construction Program, where the state pays the full cost, or nearly the full cost – of a new school – but because of that substantial cost for each project, very few schools actually get built.

We are encouraged that the bond described in L.D. 363 would appear to address both of those concerns, and we feel it would make a significant difference in beginning to tackle Maine's school infrastructure needs. We also believe much more funding is needed – including additional infusions of money into the School Revolving Renovation Fund, and we would urge your committee to seriously consider additional proposals to build and renovate Maine's schools. While the state budget is limited, approving this bond measure and sending it to the voters would send a clear message that the legislature believes in improving educational opportunities for every Maine child. We urge you to pass L.D. 363.