

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

L.D. 933

### AN ACT TO INCREASE TO 100 PERCENT THE STATE SHARE OF FUNDING FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION COSTS OF ALL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS

April 29, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Rep. Noonan Murphy, and members of the Joint Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Steven Bailey, the Executive Director 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. 933, An Act to Increase to 100 Percent the State Share of Funding for Special Education Costs of All School Administrative Units.

This measure would finally align Maine with the goals of L.D. 1, passed more than two decades ago. We all know the largest obligation in that law – for the state to fund 55 percent of K-12 education spending – but it also declared that the state must pay 100 percent of all schools’ special education costs.

This is a particular issue for Maine’s ‘minimum receiver’ districts, which now comprise nearly one-third of the districts across Maine. The property valuation in these communities would appear to paint a picture that they can provide a robust education without assistance through General Purpose Aid, but we know this is often not the case. Many residents live on fixed incomes or are considered economically disadvantaged, with little breathing room in their household budget. Many struggle to afford groceries or electric bills, and increased local property taxes affect these families hardest. The state does provide some assistance to these districts. But at this point, that amounts to only 50 percent of their special education costs – half of what was promised in L.D. 1.

That lack of promised support has been felt especially hard in recent years. Special education costs have risen steadily, with more students needing one-on-one help or attending special-purpose private schools. We are aware of how this has created unhealthy situations in certain towns, where these increased special education costs forced districts to cut other important student programming.

These districts need more support to meet the growing needs of their student bodies. In an ideal world, the federal government would also meet its own decades-old obligation under the Individuals with Disabilities Act and pay for 40 percent of all special education costs nationwide. Currently, it provides less than a third of that amount. Our organization and others continue to push for the federal government to fulfill that obligation, but without it, we need more assistance to handle these growing challenges.

L.D. 933 would offer that support at a crucial moment, and we urge your committee to support it.