



Testimony in Support of LD 1586:

“An Act to Amend the Regional School Unit Budget Validation Referendum Law”

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Harris Van Pate, and I serve as policy analyst for Maine Policy Institute. Maine Policy is a free-market think tank, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that advocates for individual liberty and economic freedom in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 1586, “An Act to Amend the Regional School Unit Budget Validation Referendum Law.”

This straightforward yet important bill would enhance transparency and voter empowerment in regional school unit (RSU) budget referenda by requiring that the budget validation question clearly state the total dollar amount of the proposed school budget.

Under current law, voters are often asked to approve school budgets without seeing the specific financial figure directly in the ballot question. Instead, they must rely on separate educational materials or attend budget meetings to understand the full fiscal impact. While civic engagement is crucial, Maine voters deserve to have essential financial information presented at the most critical decision point: the ballot box.

Including the budget’s dollar amount in the referendum question promotes several key principles:

- **Transparency:** Taxpayers are entitled to know precisely how much funding they are being asked to approve. Vague or incomplete referendum language undermines informed consent.
- **Accountability:** School districts and their leadership will have a stronger incentive to justify their budget proposals when voters can easily assess and weigh the magnitude of spending.
- **Public Trust:** Making key budgetary figures explicit fosters greater confidence in the process and strengthens the relationship between local government entities and their constituents.
- **Alignment with Best Practices:** Other states already require financial disclosures or a clear statement of amounts in bond or budget referenda, or are considering adding that requirement.^{1 2} Maine should similarly ensure that voters are fully informed.

¹ https://wasbo.com/images/wasbo/documents/6/handouts/SC2022_OperationalReferenda.pdf

² <https://wisconsinexaminer.com/2025/03/31/proposed-limits-on-school-referendum-requests-stir-debate/>



Furthermore, Maine communities face increasing pressure from rising property taxes, largely driven by educational expenditures. Ensuring voters have transparent access to financial figures is critical to protecting families, seniors, and small business owners from unchecked tax burdens. Full disclosure empowers citizens to strike a balance between a strong commitment to public education and fiscal responsibility.

In conclusion, LD 1586 is a commonsense measure that would strengthen democratic participation, increase government transparency, and respect the rights of Maine voters to make fully informed decisions about how their tax dollars are spent. Maine Policy Institute urges the committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1586. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.