

Hello legislators, thank you very much for this opportunity to provide written testimony in support of LD 673: An Act to Better Support the Educational Attainment of Low-income and Moderate-income Communities by Providing Additional Funding to Certain School Administrative Units.

My name is Tim Surette, I'm an associate professor of education at the University of Maine at Augusta, vice-chair of the Bangor School Committee, and a former school administrator and middle school science teacher at public schools in Maine.

I'm testifying today as a private citizen and do not represent the views of my employer or any organization to which I belong.

Most of us recognize that quality preK-12 education requires significant investment. That, of course, means money. If we want schools with up-to-date infrastructure, well-paid teachers, and high-quality curriculums, it means we need the funding to do that.

But have we carefully considered how money is distributed to one school versus another and why some schools are able to spend considerably more money on their students than other schools?

The answer is complicated and in Maine, it begins with the [Essential Services and Programs \(EPS\)](#) funding formula. According to the Maine Department of Education the EPS formula aims to "determine both the state and local share of funding needed for each school administrative unit (SAU) to have Essential Programs and Services."

"These Essential Programs and Services are defined as programs and resources that are essential for students to have an equitable opportunity to achieve the Maine Learning Results," the department says.

But what does equitable mean? Opinions obviously differ, but that question was on the minds of researchers at the Education Law Center, an educational advocacy organization based out of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, who released a report in 2021 titled "[Making the Grade: How Fair is School Funding in Your State](#)." The authors discussed three metrics associated with fairness or equity of school funding: Funding level; funding distribution; and funding effort. Based on 2018-2019 funding data, the state of Maine scored an "A" or "Progressive" on funding level and funding effort. However, Maine scored an "F" or "Regressive" on funding distribution.

Recent historic state-level [investments](#) in overall funding for pre K-12 public education in Maine are encouraging and important. However, the [2013 Picus report](#), an exhaustive review of the EPS funding formula pointed to revenues from local property taxes as a driver of inequitable school funding distribution in Maine. The report stated, "the Maine school funding system overall has succeeded in designing a fiscally neutral distribution of revenues. However, the addition to the system of local property tax funding above the level required to fund the EPS introduced inequities into the system. The essential fiscal neutrality finding is that the Maine school funding

system as planned would have achieved fiscal neutrality, but the differential abilities of districts with different levels of wealth (property and income) to raise local funds reduced the fiscal neutrality of the system somewhat.”

Unfortunately, several years after the release of the Picus report, inequities in pre K-12 school funding in Maine persist. As an example, according to [Maine Department of Education data](#), during the 2020-21 school year, per pupil spending in the York school department was \$20,945.88, while in the Lewiston school department per pupil spending was \$15,802.02. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, in 2021 [York](#)’s median household income was \$101,352 and the median value of owner-occupied housing units was \$451,000. Whereas, in 2021 [Lewiston](#)’s median household income was \$48,069 and median value of owner-occupied housing units was \$157,500. These striking differences in wealth between the two communities contribute to the fact that more than \$5,000 more was spent on a student attending public school in York than in Lewiston during the 2020-21 school year, which I argue is inequitable and unacceptable.

I believe LD 673 is an important step in mitigating these disparities and leveling the playing field by allowing lower and moderate-income communities in Maine the ability to apply for Educational Opportunity Grants aimed at providing additional financial support to students and school communities who need it most.

Thank you.