

TESTIMONY NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST

L.D. 1087

AN ACT TO INCREASE THE STATE'S SHARE OF MAJOR CAPITAL SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION COSTS

May 6, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy, and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am Robbie Feinberg, the director of communications and government relations for Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Superintendents Association and the Maine School Boards Association neither for nor against L.D. 1087, An Act to Increase the State's Share of Major Capital School Construction Costs.

Both superintendents and school boards support the broader goal of this bill – to adjust the current funding system for the Maine Capital School Construction Program, which currently operates in essentially an “all-or-nothing” system: if a project is approved, the state covers nearly all the funding. Yet schools that do not make the list receive no financial assistance. They must either wait for the next funding round or fund construction themselves.

This has helped the few districts that do get a school built. But dozens and dozens of other districts are still waiting, with their school buildings getting older. Many superintendents feel this is inequitable, and requiring some sort of local contribution would be an effective strategy towards helping to spread state funding out and ultimately get more districts built.

The Interim Report of the Governor's Commission on School Construction (released April 15th) speaks to this very concern. One strategy the commission highlights as a potential solution is requiring “districts to contribute funds, rather than the existing all-or-nothing state funding approach, could increase capacity for more projects. Increased local contribution could be offset in part by reducing upfront planning costs via additional state-level technical assistance. Various options should be considered, including a sliding scale based on district characteristics or the incorporation of an approach similar to the SRRF.”

L.D. 1087 attempts to correct some of these equity concerns in the school construction process – something our school leaders wholeheartedly support. However, it would not solve the broader issue of the lack of adequate resources to handle Maine's school construction needs. Maine's school infrastructure is decaying quickly, and more funding is badly needed. State officials say that conservatively, the cost to modernize Maine's aging schools would be \$11 billion. This must be addressed if we are to make meaningful progress on this issue.

Currently, the Governor's Commission on School Construction is taking a broader look at all of these questions, and we would encourage your committee to wait to see the final Commission Report before passing any legislation.