



Maine Education Association

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Testimony Neither For nor Against LD 1892, An Act to Establish Procedures for School Construction Projects May 9, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and other members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Jan Kosinski, and I am the Director of Government Relations for the Maine Education Association (MEA). The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators, including teachers and other educators in nearly every public school in the state, as well as full-time faculty and other professional and support staff in both the University of Maine and Community College systems. Thousands of retired educators continue their connection and advocacy work through the MEA- Retired program.

I offer this testimony today on behalf of the MEA NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST LD 1892, *An Act to Establish Procedures for School Construction Projects*.

We certainly appreciate the intent of this bill. Specifically, this bill attempts to draw attention to the real and growing capital needs of schools and the support and funding local communities need to provide safe, healthy learning environments for students and educators. I have testified recently before this Committee with information providing both background and information about the status of our schools and the dire need for additional capital funding to help local communities fix, repair and replace our state's aging school infrastructure.¹

We support the creation of the Maine Public School Financing Authority and hope this will provide local schools with zero-interest financing to help more schools unlock the funding they need to implement school construction projects.

We also support dedicating lapsed balances to support school construction projects through the development of a School Construction Debt Service Fund. At the end of each fiscal year, there is often tens of millions of dollars that can and should be used to fund other key priorities, including school capital needs to help local communities with these challenges.

We also support the pieces of this bill that called for new construction projects to be cost-effective, energy-efficient, with low emission standards. Our schools need to last decades, even more than a century. As communities repair and replace are aging schools, we should make sure they are as up to date as possible and represent the building techniques that will withstand the test of time. We support "green schools" because they will be better for students, taxpayers, and the environment.

¹ Please see testimony Neither for Nor Against, LD 1087, An Act to increase the State's Share of Major Capital School Construction Costs, May 6, 2025 found here: [getTestimonyDoc.asp](https://www.maineeducation.org/testimony/2025/05/06/Neither-for-Nor-Against-LD-1087-An-Act-to-increase-the-State-s-Share-of-Major-Capital-School-Construction-Costs)

While there are many promising ideas in this proposal, we believe this bill needs more consideration and discussion from this Committee than may be possible in the waning weeks of this session.

We have concerns about a few sections of this bill.

While we appreciate the intent, we are worried the other funding streams proposed in this bill such as lottery proceeds, gaming revenue, cannabis tax revenue and tobacco tax revenues are all used for various other General Fund purposes, including preK-12 schools and in support of our state's public higher education institutions. While dedicating this funding to the priority need of funding schools is laudable, we are worried it may be akin to "robbing Peter to pay Paul."

Lastly, this bill, like the proposal from Representative Boyer, proposes to move away from the "all or nothing" approach and requires that local communities to pay 25% of the total cost of the school construction project. There may be great merit to requiring local communities to pay for some of the costs. However, while taxpayers are asked to shoulder some of the responsibility to fund new construction, it will also mean fewer resources in those communities to pay for other pressing needs, such as salary and wage increases for educators, more mental health supports for students, and all the other needs students and schools face. We believe the required local share for school construction should be reached via thorough analysis and research.

We also believe the language in the bill allowing the Commissioner to adjust the local share "based on the school administrative unit's ability to pay" is too vague and open to political gamesmanship in a way that we would hope this Committee would want to prevent. The Essential Programs and Services (EPS) formula is built to be impervious to politics. Governors and legislators can propose to increase or decrease the amount subject to the school funding formula but are prevented from targeting specific districts for cuts through the school funding formula. We hope the Committee would be sure to develop safeguards to ensure all communities have an equal ability to access funding and protected from the political leanings of future commissioners and administrations when it comes to funding for school construction.

As I said when I testified on LD 1087, we strongly encourage this Committee to use the wealth of data now available to you, and the promise of a final report from the Governor's Commission on School Construction, to work together over the Fall and into next year to develop the best policies to move forward on this important topic.

Thank you for your attention and your service to the people of Maine and I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.