

Jeffrey Porter
MSAD #51
LD 1312

Dear Members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee:

I am writing in support of LD 1312 and the proposed amendment which would direct the State Controller to transfer investment proceeds so that 50% of the investment earnings are earmarked to the Major School Construction Fund at the close of each month.

This amendment would begin to fund a gaping hole in the state's infrastructure and start to fulfill a promise that has not been kept in providing state assistance for building new school facilities in Maine. For too long, too few buildings have been approved for state funding with an ever-growing list whose needs will never be met.

Across our state, countless schools—the very foundations of our communities—are fighting against leaky roofs, outdated heating systems, and facilities built for a bygone era. These conditions create unequal learning environments. A student in a dilapidated school, struggling with poor lighting, inadequate ventilation, and laboratories unfit for modern STEM instruction, is inherently at a disadvantage compared to a peer in a state-of-the-art facility.

The crushing burden of multi-million dollar construction and renovation projects currently rests on local communities. When school funding is tied primarily to local property taxes, it creates a deeply unequal system. State intervention is the only way to ensure that the financial responsibility for educating the state's children is distributed fairly and equitably amongst all taxpayers.

In 2023, MSAD 51, Cumberland-North Yarmouth, voters approved a \$53.5 million project after a previous failed attempt at the polls. This approval allows the school district to build a new elementary school and add on to a second school after nearly a decade of modular buildings amounting to 33 temporary classroom spaces. When it was evident the district would never receive state funding despite the desperate need for a new building, the community's voters chose to go it alone. Too many times in our state, this has been the case, and we were at least fortunate to have had the support of the local community. Other communities have not been as fortunate despite their extensive need.

The cost of deferred maintenance—continually patching old systems, addressing mold, making emergency repairs and investing in temporary space—always exceeds the cost of proactive replacement and modernization. Old schools, or nonexistent ones, are inefficient energy consumers, draining operating budget dollars that should be spent on teachers and textbooks. State capital funding, often secured via bonding, allows districts to address these large-scale, unavoidable infrastructure needs now, preventing catastrophic failure and saving taxpayers millions in reactive spending down the line.

We cannot afford to treat our essential educational infrastructure as an afterthought. I urge our state representatives to prioritize the health, safety, and future success of our students by dramatically increasing and streamlining state support for school construction. Please support LD 1312 and the proposed amendment. Thank you.