

Testimony

IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 2226

“An Act to Amend the Essential Programs and Services School Funding Formula”

BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

DATE: March 9, 2026

Senator Rafferty, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Cameron Hinkley, and I’m the Town Manager in Buckfield. I’m here to support L.D. 2226 because what we’re doing now doesn’t add up for towns like ours.

I see it every day at the town office. People come in who are working, raising families, and trying to do the right thing—pay their taxes, keep their homes, keep the lights on—and the numbers just keep tightening. The problem is that the current system leans so heavily on property values to measure “ability to pay.” Around here, property values have been climbing fast, and Buckfield’s state assessment has grown exponentially. But the folks living in those houses aren’t seeing their paychecks keep up, especially those living on fixed incomes. When the formula treats us as if we’re suddenly wealthy, it pushes more and more of the school funding burden onto local property taxpayers, even when the actual ability to pay hasn’t changed.

L.D. 2226 is a practical fix to that real-world problem.

First, the income indicator matters. If the state is going to use fiscal capacity to decide a town’s local share, it needs to look at more than just the value of land and buildings. Adding an income indicator to balance property fiscal capacity is a commonsense step. It helps close the gap between “value” on paper and what people can truly afford. For Buckfield, that’s the heart of the issue.

Second, the change to special education helps small rural districts manage costs that can swing wildly from year to year. Raising the special education prevalence threshold from 15% to 17% is not about lowering standards or services, it’s about recognizing how a small number of high-need situations can have an outsized impact on a small district’s budget. When those costs spike, the pressure lands back on local taxpayers. This adjustment gives communities like ours a more workable, predictable path.

L.D. 2226 won’t solve everything overnight, but it moves the formula closer to reality. It’s a fairer way to share responsibility for education funding across the state. One that better matches what towns can actually pay.

For those reasons, I respectfully ask the Committee to report L.D. 2226 out as "**Ought to Pass.**"

Respectfully submitted,

Cameron Hinkley

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