

Hello Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs: My name is Philip Johnston, I am a resident of Hallowell, and have also worked as school administrator in Lewiston Public Schools for the past 5 years in middle and high school settings. **I am testifying in FAVOR of LD 2226.**

As an Administrator in a public high school in Lewiston, it is not only my job to guide the implementation of high quality educational programming, but also to envision what education should look like for our students' future. This vision includes things such as high quality programs that target growth in literacy, math, and executive functioning, which we know are the basic building blocks every student needs to succeed. It includes support for youth development practices that help our kids navigate the myriad challenges that adolescence, poverty, and the future will throw at them. And it includes impactful professional development training for our staff, designed to give them the tools to unlock their students' deepest potential. I can confirm for you that we are working tirelessly to make this vision a reality for our kids in Lewiston. Yet at the same time, each year we are being asked to carry out this vision with less.

While spending per pupil may look like it has gone up, the reality is that the costs to educate our students are increasing BEFORE we even get a chance to design for this educational vision. We're seeing this across all industries: healthcare premiums are skyrocketing, wages are barely keeping pace with inflation, and these same forces are hitting school districts, meaning budgets are increasing even while the roles our students need are getting cut. This satisfies no one and fails our kids.

My experience is that this turns our discussions at the ground level to be about contract language, or outsourcing to cheaper options of care, or how to shift schedules to serve more kids instead of hiring more to reduce class sizes. Meanwhile, I see bargaining units pitted against each other, arguing for fair pay, and citizens frustrated about larger property tax bills, not realizing that we are simply fighting over the scraps.

No one wants this vision of education, and if you have been asking yourself why we are not seeing positive shifts, these are some of the reasons. Just as we share roads, beautiful natural resources, and emergency systems in our State, we share the responsibility to educate our children to carry on our vision for the future, and this bill would be a step in the right direction by allocating more necessary funds to those who need it most.

By supporting LD 2226, you are giving high poverty districts a fighting chance to uphold the vision of a high quality education that I trust every Mainer wants for our kids. The choice is simple: intervene now to help us achieve this vision, or do nothing and watch our neediest districts cut positions and essential services each year until there is really nothing left.

I want to thank you all for your consideration of my testimony today and I urge you to vote yes on LD 2226. Thank you.