

Elyse Tipton  
City of South Portland  
LD 2226

Testimony of South Portland Mayor Elyse Tipton

IN SUPPORT of LD 2226, An Act to Amend the Essential Programs and Services  
School Funding Formula

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

March 9, 2026

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Committee:

My name is Elyse Tipton, and I serve as the mayor of the City of South Portland. I am offering this testimony today in that capacity and as a former chair of the South Portland Board of Education, where I served for seven years. That experience gave me a close view of how Maine's school funding formula affects classrooms, budgets, communities, and—most importantly—students.

I urge your support for LD 2226, which represents an important opportunity to improve the fairness of Maine's school funding formula.

For two decades, the Essential Programs and Services (EPS) formula has guided the distribution of state education funding. Over time, however, its components have become outdated and increasingly disconnected from the realities facing many Maine school districts today.

One of the most significant gaps has been the formula's failure to adequately account for the additional costs of educating students living in poverty. LD 2226 takes an important step toward correcting that.

By integrating a district's rate of economically disadvantaged students into the formula—using eligibility for free-and-reduced school meals as a proxy—this legislation recognizes what educators already know: students experiencing poverty often require additional supports to succeed. Those supports include reading specialists, counselors, ed techs, and programs that help students arrive ready to learn.

The bill does not increase the overall amount of state funding. Instead, it modernizes how existing funding is distributed, directing greater support to districts serving higher concentrations of economically disadvantaged students.

That approach matters for communities like South Portland.

South Portland serves 2,902 students, and 43.3 percent of them are economically disadvantaged. Under LD 2226, our district would receive approximately \$640,642 in additional annual state funding, or about \$221 per student.

At a time when our school district is working to construct a budget that will still require more than a six percent increase in property taxes, even while considering significant reductions in staffing and programs, that support would make a meaningful difference.

Our community is proud to support its schools, but the increasing reliance on local property taxes is placing unsustainable pressure on municipal budgets and on residents.

LD 2226 also recognizes another reality: property valuation does not always reflect a community's ability to support its schools. In coastal communities like South Portland, property values can be driven by factors such as seasonal ownership and housing demand that do not necessarily reflect the income or resources of the families whose children attend our schools.

South Portland is not alone in this challenge.

The coalition of districts supporting these reforms collectively serves 34,932 students and would receive \$12.37 million in recurring annual funding under LD 2226—an average of \$354 per student.

Many of these districts represent Maine's urban core and highest-concentration poverty communities. Six of the eleven districts serve populations where more than 55 percent of students are economically disadvantaged, and three communities rank among the highest poverty rates in the state.

Importantly, the funding changes proposed in LD 2226 would become part of the recurring state subsidy baseline, providing stable support for the services students need.

For too long, many educators and local officials have described Maine's school funding system as a "ZIP code problem." LD 2226 is a thoughtful, research-based step toward addressing that concern.

As a former school board chair, I know how difficult school budget decisions can be. As mayor, I see how those decisions affect municipal budgets and the financial pressures facing residents.

LD 2226 moves Maine toward a more equitable distribution of state education funding, helping ensure that every child—regardless of where they live or their family's circumstances—has access to the support they need to succeed in school.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you will support LD 2226, for fair funding of our hardest-working schools.