

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Emily Hill from Portland, ME, where I am a resident and a parent at our local public elementary school, Reiche Community School, as well as a family physician who takes an interest in caring for the underserved Mainers in our communities.

I am writing in strong support of LD2226, “An Act to Amend the Essential Programs and Services School Funding Formula”. I believe this bill goes a long way toward improving the state-wide educational funding system that does not adequately support communities, like our home of Portland, which is suffering from the imbalance of incredibly high property values with relatively unchanged incomes. The current funding formula does not meet the needs of Maine students from low-income households and leaves districts caring for these students inadequately funded.

I grew up in Hermon, ME, graduating from Hermon High School in 2006. I had to beg for more schoolwork, and did not have access to AP classes nor the extracurriculars that my peers did in other districts at that time. I am not naïve to the challenges that smaller, more rural towns in Maine face. I am aware of the vast economic challenges our state faces and am hopeful our legislators can find ways to raise revenue from the wealthiest residents and visitors our state is host to. In the meantime, I am also aware of the desperately needed policy updates to more equitably and adequately educate Maine children.

The current funding formula is based on a town’s property value and does not take into account income or poverty rates. Whether urban or rural, we know that students in these demographics both need and benefit greatly from additional services, more ed techs, and more dedicated programming. Rising housing costs often exacerbate these needs, as more classrooms and schools are composed of wider ranges of skills, types of learners and needs. Not only that, it also

Overall, LD 2226 will better support districts that educate higher rates of children from low-income households. This is not unique to Portland. We know that districts across the state from Houlton to Machias to Lewiston to Farmington would benefit. The regional adjustment of LD2226 would more accurately reflect the cost of hiring and retaining educators -- districts could more appropriately pay educators and staff the salaries they deserve. However, I would like to advocate for improvements in the bill to better account for the true range of demographics these towns face. I propose a gradual phase-in of a formula that more accurately reflects these demographics, such as a ratio of 75% on property values and 25% on income/poverty levels.

All Maine children deserve a high-quality education, no matter what background they come from and no matter what town they live, regardless of whether that town may appear to be well off simply by the amount of expensive housing it has. Funding education with property taxes as the benchmark is no longer acceptable and is failing some of our neediest districts. Educators and districts deserve the funding to be able to provide the education Mainers deserve.

Thank you all for your time and attention to improving public education in the State of Maine.