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Whiting
LD 2226

Testimony in Support of LD 2226

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

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

I am submitting testimony in support of LD 2226 because I believe it moves Maine's school funding system in a direction that is fairer and more transparent for taxpayers while still supporting students.

As someone who generally approaches education policy from a fiscally conservative perspective, I believe strongly that taxpayers deserve to know that the dollars they contribute are being allocated in a way that is predictable, rational, and based on real costs rather than outdated assumptions.

This bill begins to address several areas where the Essential Programs and Services funding formula has become disconnected from reality. For example, it updates the way transportation costs are calculated and sets a reasonable boundary so that transportation allocations cannot exceed 105% of the most recent year's expenditures adjusted for inflation

For taxpayers, guardrails like this matter. They ensure that funding formulas do not unintentionally reward inefficiency or runaway cost growth.

I also support the proposal to incorporate income indicators into the calculation of a community's local contribution to education funding. Property values alone do not always reflect a community's true ability to pay. Including income as part of the formula helps ensure that the burden on taxpayers is distributed more fairly across the state.

Additionally, the bill updates the special education prevalence threshold from 15% to 17% and makes adjustments to how high-cost placements are funded

Special education costs are a major driver of school budgets, and while those services are absolutely necessary, the funding structure must be realistic and sustainable. Adjustments like these help align the formula more closely with the actual needs districts are experiencing.

Another important component is the move to base regional cost adjustments on nationwide cost-of-living data. Maine is not one uniform economic region. The cost of hiring and retaining staff differs significantly across the state, and the funding formula should recognize those differences.

From my perspective, the key value of this bill is that it focuses on improving the structure of the funding formula rather than simply increasing spending. Maine already spends a significant amount per pupil, and taxpayers are rightly asking whether the system is allocating those dollars in the most effective way possible.

LD 2226 is not a perfect solution, but it is a thoughtful attempt to modernize parts of the funding formula and make it more equitable for both schools and taxpayers.

For those reasons, I support LD 2226 and appreciate the committee's work in reviewing Maine's school funding structure.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Colleen Brown