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**RE: Letter of Support for LD 2226 — An Act to Improve Maine’s Essential Programs and Services School Funding Formula**

Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Marianne Moore. I represent Senate District 6, which includes every municipality and unorganized territory in Washington County, along with sixteen communities in eastern Hancock County — from Sullivan and Gouldsboro on the peninsula, to Hancock and Winter Harbor on the coast, to the interior townships most people have never heard of. It is one of the largest and most rural Senate districts in the state.

I did not end up here by accident. I have lived in many places across this country, as the daughter of an Air Force non-commissioned officer, and have visited all fifty states. I chose to retire in Maine. I chose to stay. I served on the Calais City Council for three terms and as an elected mayor for two; I deliver Meals on Wheels; I serve on the Eastern Area Agency on Aging’s Governance Board; and, before coming to the Senate, I worked as a Washington County Cancer Patient Navigator — helping families find care when the system made it nearly impossible. I tell you all this because it shapes how I see this legislation. I know what it looks like when communities are not getting the resources they need. I have been watching it for years.

The question I hear most often from the families in my district is not a policy question. It is a personal one: is there a future here for my children? The answer to that question depends on many things — jobs, housing, healthcare, services — but it begins with schools. When a young family is deciding whether to stay in Gouldsboro or Pembroke or Sullivan, they ask about the school. When a family is deciding whether to move back to the community they grew up in, they ask about the school. The school is the anchor. It is often the largest employer in the town, the center of its social life, the institution that signals whether a community believes in itself and in the generation coming up behind it. Every time a school in my district loses a program, cuts a specialist, or eliminates an elective because the state formula did not provide

what was needed, it sends a message to families. The message clearly says: there may not be a future here for your children. 😞 We cannot afford to keep sending that message.

I want to speak about poverty in my district not as a statistic but as something I have seen up close, in people's kitchens, living rooms and waiting rooms. Washington County has the highest county poverty rate in Maine. The community of Hancock has 67% of its enrolled students qualifying as economically disadvantaged. Cherryfield is at nearly 74%. Jonesport, Pembroke, Indian Township, Machias, Cutler, and community after community across this district tell the same story. These are not families who lack work ethic or community pride. They are families working hard in industries that are seasonal, uncertain, and often dangerous — fishing, forestry, blueberries, tourism — in places where the cost of everything keeps going up and the reliable middle-class jobs that once sustained these communities are gone. Their children deserve schools that reflect what they are worth, not what the current formula calculates them to be worth.

I want to be clear about what I am asking for, because I think it matters to say it plainly: I am not asking this committee to help my communities survive at the level they are at right now. Surviving at the current level means continuing to cut, continuing to lose programs, continuing to watch talented educators leave for better-funded districts, and continuing to tell children in rural Maine a full education is something that happens somewhere else. What I am asking for is the chance to grow. To restore what has been lost. To add a counselor to a school in Gouldsboro or Sullivan that does not have one. To bring back a vocational program, a music program, an arts class, an extended learning opportunity working families in my district cannot afford to provide privately. The EPS formula, reformed as LD 2226 proposes, creates the conditions to begin that work. Not to complete it overnight — but to begin.

The three changes in LD 2226 — the corrected regional adjustment that stops penalizing rural districts with a negative factor and finally sets a floor of 1.00, the income-adjusted ability-to-pay calculation that stops confusing property values with community wealth, and the variable weight for economically disadvantaged students that reflects the true depth and concentration of need — are not radical ideas. They are corrections to structural flaws that have compounded over years. The rural districts in my Senate district have been carrying an undersized formula for a long time. The communities have absorbed those cuts quietly, with the resilience that defines rural Maine. Resilience is not a funding strategy, and it should not have to be.

The simulation modeling for LD 2226 makes the scale of the impact on my district clear. Washington County would receive approximately \$2.36 million in additional annual state subsidy under the combined regional adjustment and income-adjusted ability-to-pay model. This includes more than \$591,000 to MSAD #37, which serves Harrington, Milbridge, and the surrounding communities; more than \$274,000 to Machias; \$155,000 to East Machias; \$136,000 to Cherryfield; and meaningful gains to Jonesport, Calais, Eastport, Pembroke, and

dozens of smaller communities across the county. In the Hancock County communities I represent, the town of Hancock alone would see a gain of more than \$280,000. Across the full breadth of Senate District 6, the combined additional investment in state education funding would approach and very likely exceed four million dollars annually. For families who have watched their local schools cut year after year, this is not just a number. It is a lifeline.

People talk about Maine's population decline as though it is inevitable, as though rural communities are simply in a long, slow exhale toward disappearing. I do not accept that. I have seen communities come back. I have seen families choose to stay and choose to return when conditions give them a reason to believe. Strong schools are one of the most powerful signals a community can send that it is worth investing in — worth staying for. LD 2226 is, among other things, a rural retention bill. It tells families in Gouldsboro and Sullivan and Hancock and Winter Harbor and a hundred small Washington County communities that Augusta sees them. The formula is being fixed, and their children are worth the investment. I chose Maine. Thousands of families in my district are making that same calculation every year. Let's give them a better answer.

I urge the Committee to support LD 2226. This is a bill that deserves a vote and a yes from every member who believes in the basic promise that Maine makes to its children — all of its children, in every corner of this state. It is a meaningful step toward correcting the failures of the current formula, and the communities in my district have been waiting long enough. I am grateful to the committee for its attention to this legislation and urge you to move it forward.

Respectfully submitted,



Senator Marianne Moore  
Maine State Senate, District 6