

Honorable members of the Education Committee,

I have submitted testimony over Zoom, and you have a copy of what was said in person under my name as a resident of Buckfield. However, as a member of my Select Board I would like you to consider a few things I did not emphasize in my personal testimony. Even disregarding the information outlined below, **I urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass to advance this urgently needed relief.**

I urge the committee to tailor the bill **to consider the percentage of fixed-income residents** in a community, or otherwise address this factor. This consideration leads many members of our aging, small communities like mine to reject the School Budget. Not out of a lack of support for our children's education, but out of fear of what they would have to take from out of their own household budgets.

Additionally, I believe that the poverty consideration is a step in the right direction, but would ask the Committee to **consider how poverty is measured** in the modern age. The Federal poverty level is currently set at \$15,960 gross income in a year for a single earner.

- That is equivalent to that single earner making \$7.67/hour gross income, at a 40 hour/week job.
- Even at a 20 hour/week job, that would be a gross income of \$15.35/hour, just over the current State minimum wage.

I do not believe this accurately reflects poverty in this State or in my community, especially factoring in Maine's higher than average cost of living. According to the Bangor Daily News, the **cost of living in Maine is about 13 percent higher than the national average**, and other sources put that above 15 percent. Childcare is more expensive here, as is healthcare, housing, taxes, and transportation.

More than 48% of renters in Maine devoted at least 30% of their income on housing in 2020-24, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. This makes almost half of Maine renters as a whole "cost burdened." Here in Oxford County, Rental costs are the most burdensome in the State, as more than 54% of renters there spent more than 30% of their income on housing in 2020-24, according to census data.

(<https://www.bangordailynews.com/2026/02/23/business/business-housing/nearly-half-maine-renters-paying-too-much-joam40zk0w/>)

Thank you for your consideration and thought as you evaluate this bill. Please take action, for my community as well as the hundreds of others like it.

Azalea Cormier  
Buckfield Select Board  
azaleacormier@townofbuckfield.org