

Demetria Garnsey
Sumner
LD 2226

Testimony

IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 2226

“An Act to Amend the Essential Programs and Services School Funding Formula”
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND
CULTURAL AFFAIRS

DATE: March 9, 2026

Senator Rafferty, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on
Education
and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Demetria Garnsey, and I live in Sumner. I am here to support L.D. 2226 because the year over year property tax burdens on our community are unsustainable.

As everyone is already aware, ordinary cost of living has increased exponentially in the last several years, stretching budgets beyond feasibility. Food, clothing, housing, fuel, and medical care are more expensive than ever before. Our community is extremely rural, aging, and poor. Many neighbors are disabled, elderly, or both and cannot work. They have no savings and depend upon social safety nets for survival. Our food bank is seeing higher demand than ever in part due to federal SNAP cuts so families are having to make choices between feeding themselves and heating their homes. Those who do work away from home are now battling the cost of diesel (nearly \$6 a gallon) and gas (nearly \$4 for regular) in addition to everything else. Property taxes take the lowest priority while it also means risking their very homes.

I've lived in other places during my adult life, and property taxes here are significantly higher. The Town recently reassessed properties, and we saw exponential increases due to prevailing exorbitant housing prices. With 60% of that tax going to education (nearly \$3,000 for my household with no school age children), I'd expect our community's kids to receive high quality schooling in safe buildings with teachers sufficiently compensated for their sacrifices to public service, but our facilities are out of date, in need of much maintenance, and have recently been subject to multiple infestations of pests. Lack of local skilled educators means some travel from as far as Portland (an 80 minute drive) to teach.

Our local community has voted to explore withdrawal from RSU 10 citing lack of adequate representation, disconnection from the seat in Rumford, and lack of local control. While withdrawal has been proven by other localities to yield no cost savings, the concept is born of sheer desperation and is the evidence of a region bent financially to breaking. We are desperate for some form of relief.

Quality education begins at kindergarten, and if that isn't delivered consistently at a fundamental level through high school, the outcomes are not ideal. It becomes a vicious cycle of low wages, lack of ability to assess situations and think critically. It makes people susceptible to the societal ills of all rural communities such as poor health, mental health and substance use disorders, domestic violence, and general decay. Those who have transcended an area's shortcomings leave. They don't return to reinvest in the community that didn't serve them and as a result, homes that have stood for hundreds of years are sold off or left to rot. Within a five mile radius of my home are dozens that sit empty as nature reclaims them. Hearth contains the word "heart," and without tending, the fires tended by generations of hard work die.

L.D. 2226 is a partial fix to the problem and I urge the committee to support the proposal. Ideally, a full decoupling of educational funding from property taxes would occur, as all of us deserve dignity, warm homes, full bellies, and robust educations regardless of ability to pay. We cannot revitalize when our lives are spent already scraping.

I appreciate your time and consideration,

Demetria Garnsey
Sumner