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***Testimony of Rep. Valli Geiger introducing  
LD 1160, Resolve, Directing the Department of Education to Conduct a Study on the  
Equity of the State Education Formula  
Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee***

Good morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and honorable members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Valli Geiger and I represent District 42 which includes Rockland, most of Owls Head and the islands of North Haven, Matinicus, Crie Haven and the Muscle Ridge. I am here to introduce LD 1160, "A Resolve, Directing the Department of Education to Conduct a Study on the Equity of the State Education Formula."

Prior to being elected to the Legislature, I was a Rockland City Councilor for six years. Rockland is a service center community and notable in Knox County for having:

- A high mill rate of \$24.27 per \$1000 evaluation vs. the Knox County average rate of \$15.07, and the Maine average rate of \$14.59.
- A low annual median income of \$48,871 vs. \$63,182 for Maine as a whole.
- A high poverty rate of 13.7% versus 10.9% for the state.
- 70% of its children qualifying for free or reduced lunch.

It is within that context that I have spent years struggling to understand an education formula that provides less per student to Rockland than to other service centers and much less when compared to more rural districts. The average cost per student in 2021 is estimated to be \$14,145 in Maine. Rockland receives \$3,408 per student or 24% of that amount.

This low level of support results in costs that ripple across the community. Some costs include, increased sprawl as families choose not to live in Rockland but move to outlying communities with much lower mill rates or a city with crumbling infrastructure, a school without the funds to provide the services needed and elderly residents on fixed incomes forced to leave their homes due to the high property taxes necessary to pay for public education.

Education spending in Rockland makes up 50.52% of the property taxes raised. The formula has other effects as well. Maine also allocates education capital funding based on the school funding formula. RSU 13 has not received capital funding for a new school or a school renovation in decades. Therefore the debt on capital costs belongs to RSU 13 communities alone, while other communities throughout Maine receive full capital funding for new buildings and renovations.

Many of us who voted for the state to increase its contribution to public education to 55% assumed we were voting to have 55% of education costs per school district, not the wildly unequal school spending that exists today. The United States has no national system of public education. However, the states, under their constitutions, are obligated to support and maintain systems of free public schools for all resident children. States, not school districts, are the units of government in the U.S. legally responsible for operating our nation's public school systems and providing the funding necessary to support and maintain those systems.

Education is a state mandate. Maine faces an acute workforce shortage and a high number of students who fail to go on to post-secondary education, remaining neither in school nor in the workforce. Our schools need enriched pre-school to ensure children are ready to learn. Our students need quality education to prepare them for the world of education and employment. Our communities need equitable funding to make that happen.

This resolve seeks to undertake a new study of school funding equity. The Pinkus Study was done in 2013 and while described Maine's funding formula as equitable, even then it noted that the local school funding portion is likely to lead to wide inequities and indeed that is what has happened over time.

Thank you for and I would be happy to answer any questions.