

State of Maine
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Testimony of Fern Desjardins, Chair of the State Board of Education

In Support of: L.D. 1185: An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Recapitalize the School Revolving Renovation Fund.

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

Sponsored by: Senator Ingwersen

Date: April 26, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs:

My name is Fern Desjardins, Chair of the Maine State Board of Education. I am here to speak in support of L.D. 1185: An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Recapitalize the School Revolving Renovation Fund.

Earlier this week I submitted testimony on behalf of the State Board in support of L.D. 193 “An Act to Provide Excess General Fund Revenue to the School Revolving Renovation Fund and the Education Stabilization Fund.” I noted that the School Construction Committee of the State Board had met with regional presidents and other representatives of the Maine School Superintendents Association to discuss issues surrounding Major Capital School Construction Projects and the School Revolving Renovation Fund. Discussions in those meetings included overall construction and renovation needs, limitations with the current cap on revolving renovations funding, and projects that fall above the renovation caps but below Major Capital School Construction Projects. Other superintendents have also contacted me directly as Chair of the State Board’s School Construction Committee to share their needs for school renovations.

I stated in my testimony for L.D. 193 that there appeared to be consensus that the need for school renovations far outweighs the resources we currently have to meet those needs. Calculations that I made from data contained in a MDOE School Facilities Inventory Report: 20-A M.R.S. §15917, titled *Construction of Active Maine Schools by Decade* indicate that 82.8% of the schools were originally constructed prior to the 1990s. In fact, 60.8% were originally constructed before the 1970s making them over 50 years old. It is not surprising that a number of our public schools are in need of renovations or replacement.

With the rising costs of renovations, School Administrative Units have needs that rise above the \$1 million maximum loan amount to address each priority in a school building within any 5-year period and the \$4 million maximum total loans for repairs, renovations, and improvement projects for a school building from the School Revolving Renovation Fund. Therefore, amendments to Chapter 64, *Maine School Facilities Program and School Revolving Renovation Fund* should be considered if L.D. 1185 moves forward.

The State Board of Education recognizes the need for school renovations and capital repairs across Maine and advocates for funding to support the School Revolving Renovation Fund. Whether or not that is best accomplished through the issuance of bonds on behalf of the State in the amount of \$100,000,000 to recapitalize the School Revolving Renovation Fund is best determined by the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and the Legislature in the exploration of funding options. The State Board would support L.D. 1185 for what it could do toward making schools safer and healthier by infusing a significant amount of money in the School Revolving Renovation Fund.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment, and I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.