

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

L.D. 1748

AN ACT TO REFORM THE SCHOOL BUDGET REFERENDUM PROCESS BY LIMITING THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH REFERENDA OCCUR

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Steven Bailey, executive director of Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association, in support of L.D. 1748.

MSSA and MSBA both support L.D. 1748. It recommends changes based on the evolution of the Budget Referendum Validation (BVR) process since its inception. At this point in time, districts have made decisions to continue the BVR process or not. L.D. 1748 establishes a contingency process for those districts that continue to hold the BVR election to approve the school district budget each year.

There will need to be a positive action each year seeking the referendum. Otherwise, the vote at the school budget meeting will be the official vote on the budget. The referendum would be required "if a written petition signed by at least 20% of the number of voters voting in the last gubernatorial election in the municipalities in the school administrative unit, is filed with the regional school unit board within 30 days of the approval of the budget at a regional school unit budget meeting as provided in section 1485."

Superintendents and school board members of the respective associations see this as a positive step. Too often the school budget meetings are attended by few people, with residents knowing that they can skip that meeting and have a chance to vote on the budget at the BVR election – often without having knowledge of the components of the budget. It is thought that with this proposed language, if approved, there would be greater attendance and engagement at the school budget meetings where questions can be asked and informed votes cast regarding each cost center of the budget.

MSSA and MSBA urge members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs to vote OTP on L.D. 1748.