



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, Distinguished Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

My name is Will Tuell. I represent House District 10 in central Washington County, and am here today to enthusiastically present LD 181, "An Act to Modify the Calculation of Pupil Counts Used for the Determination of School Administrative Unit Operating Costs."

That's a mouthful, but for those of you who have been around the committee a couple of years, it should sound familiar. My predecessor, Hon. Ken "Bucket" Davis, submitted this legislation at the request of our local school superintendent in the 131st Legislature to ensure that rural, economically disadvantaged schools were getting the funding they are supposed to under state law.

This committee came to a unanimous agreement, that bill, LD 808 sailed to passage, and was even voted off the special appropriations table in the last days of the last session before it got caught up in a stack of bills the Chief Executive pocket vetoed.

I do not say that to point the finger, just to remind folks of the extraordinary effort this committee and the Legislature put forward to pass a quality piece of legislation, and to explain why it is back before you today.

Despite the long and confusing title, LD 181 is really quite simple. It funds schools the greater of the average per pupil count over the last three years or the most recent October 1 count so that schools in rural areas which have seen enrollment swings and those who have suddenly seen an influx of new students are made whole.

There are others behind me who will go much deeper into the weeds, and probably simplify this even further, but basically, DOE requires schools to report enrollment numbers every October. Those enrollment figures are at the heart of the subsidy disbursement. But what happens when you have a student move into a community a week later, a month later, or for some crazy reason in the middle of the coldest winter in ten years.

It happens, and in small, rural schools like ours in central Washington County where budgets are bare bones, it means the school is educating a student – as they should – with no expectation of getting subsidy for that student until the following year.

Mind you, that same student's family may move again before the school year is out, leaving the local community where the student attended school, assuming the cost of the education and the possibility of never recouping subsidy.

There are as many reasons why students move as there are students. Whether it's the housing crisis, drug crisis, foster care, family breakups, or the parents discover that Maine is great in the summertime but living here full time in the coldest winter in a decade really isn't for them. There are a zillion reasons, but the bottom line is, our schools should not be left holding the bag.

That is why I believe this committee came up with a compromise that could work for school districts large and small. You will hear from some of those folks today and their unique circumstances that could lead to funding going into areas that truly need it the most.

Is this bill the answer to all our school funding problems? No, it isn't, but with enrollment all over the place, it is more important than ever that the money does in fact follow the student and that those communities who are educating students "for free" are getting a measure of their expenses back.

As I said above, others behind me with the nuts and bolts knowledge of school finance and enrollment will be testifying behind me, and will be in a much better position to answer any questions you may have. I would encourage you to take advantage of that opportunity, and move ahead with another unanimous vote of LD 181.

Thank you.