



Maine Education Association

Jesse Hargrove *President*
Beth French *Vice President*
Jaye Rich *Treasurer*
Rebecca Cole *NEA Director*
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Testimony

In Support Of

LD 501: An Act to Fairly fund School Administrative Units for Economically Disadvantaged Students

Jan Kosinski, Government Relations Director, Maine Education Association

Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

February 26, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and other esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Jan Kosinski, and I am the Director of Government Relations for the Maine Education Association (MEA). The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators, including teachers and other educators in nearly every public school in the state, as well as full-time faculty and other professional and support staff in both the University of Maine and Community College systems. Thousands of retired educators continue their connection and advocacy work through the MEA-Retired program.

I offer this testimony today on behalf of the MEA in SUPPORT of LD 501, *An Act to Fairly Fund School Administrative Units for Economically Disadvantaged Students*.

Last session, the Maine Department of Education produced a chart as a presentation for this Committee that I continue to find extremely useful, and I have included it with my testimony today. The chart listed nearly all the SAUs in the state and ranked them by quintile depending upon how much state aid they receive. The quintile on the left included all the schools that typically get 0-20% of their funding from the Essential Programs and Services (EPS) school funding formula. Those on the right rely on state aid for 80% or more of their funding. The chart listed the percentage above the Essential Programs and Services (ESP) amount they were spending.

We like to say that we want every student in Maine to have access to a top-notch public education regardless of zip code, but this chart shows we are not living up to that mantra. It shows that zip codes matter. It shows the huge inequities in school funding throughout our state. With these funding inequities come inequities of opportunity for students in our state. This chart makes the case for this bill and clearly highlights why sending more state aid to students with high concentrations of disadvantaged students is critical.

As you heard representatives from the Department of Education describe on Monday, EPS is an adequacy model of public education. I refer to EPS as the "Chevette" model of public education – not a "Cadillac." It is designed to provide schools with the resources they need meet the state's



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Learning Results with a mix of state aid and local property taxes.

The funding formula recognizes the local ability to pay based on property values. Coastal towns, resort areas and our state's most affluent communities receive less state aid, and towns with low property values receive more. And it should come as no surprise that many of the same towns with low property values also have high concentrations of disadvantaged students. I hope we can all agree that disadvantaged students often need more resources to achieve the same outcomes as their more affluent peers.

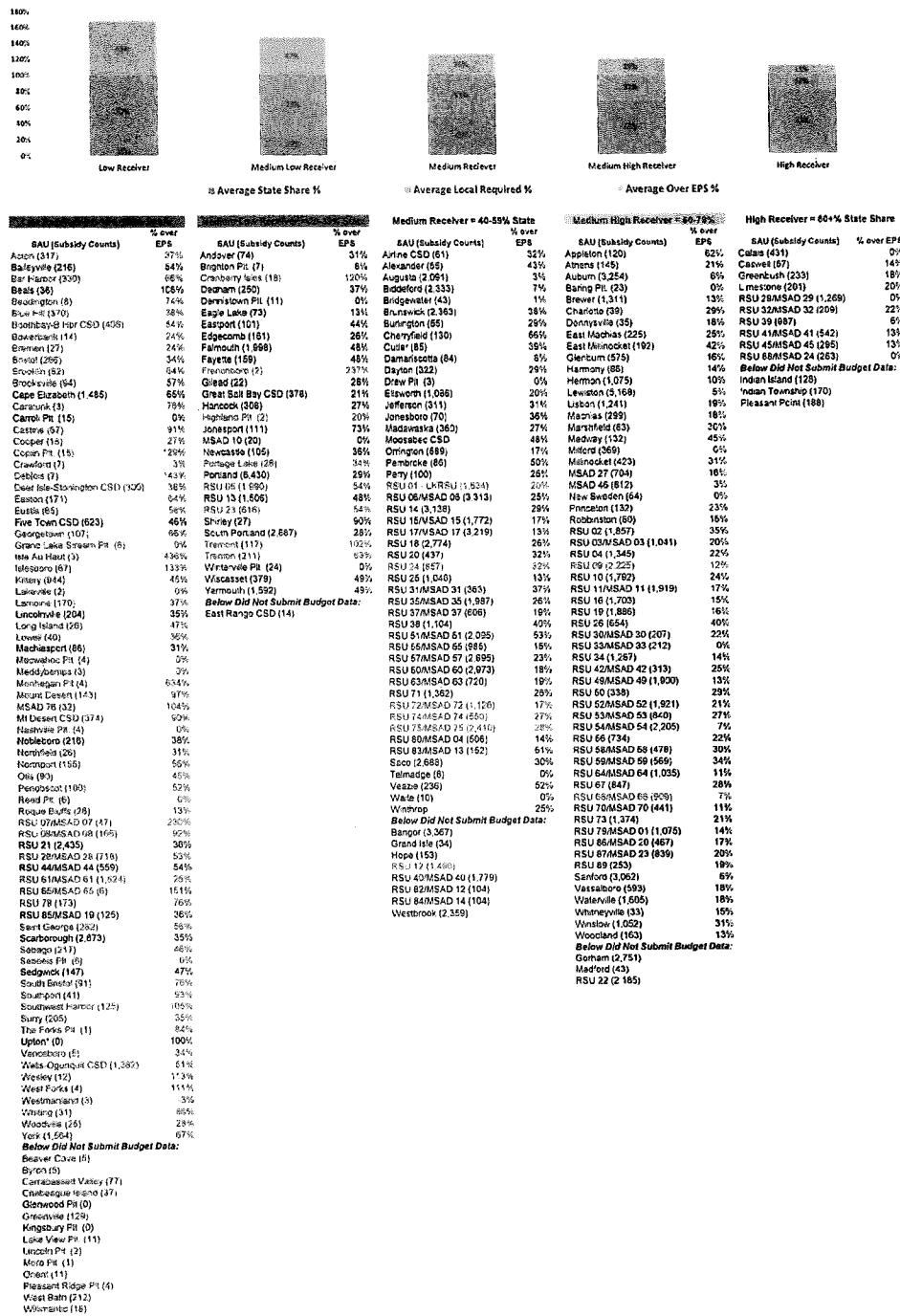
But the chart before you shows the towns with higher property values and in most cases more local wealth are able to spend well above the EPS level. I will not call out any specific towns or districts by name, and certainly in some cases the percentages may be impacted by specific local factors, but as you can see on the left hand side of the chart, towns receiving the least amount of state aid are spending well above what the state deems the minimum standard. However, on the right side of the bar chart, you see the towns/districts getting the highest amount of state aid are often barely able to find the local resources to pay the minimum. This is inequity – pure and simple. The more affluent parts of Maine are making good choices and finding the local money to provide more and better educational opportunities to their students, while the towns struggling with low property values and more disadvantaged students are struggling to pay for the Chevette.

This bill will not end this inequity. But we believe doubling the disadvantaged multiplier will bring some much needed leveling to the funding formula. It will raise the cost of education, but in a targeted manner that provides funding to the communities and schools that need it the most.

There is no immediate solution to eradication the school funding inequities across our state. We certainly would not support efforts to stifle those towns who are raising above and building strong community support for their schools through their taxpayers. But we also know we can and must do more to make sure the towns with the most struggle in our state are getting the help they need.

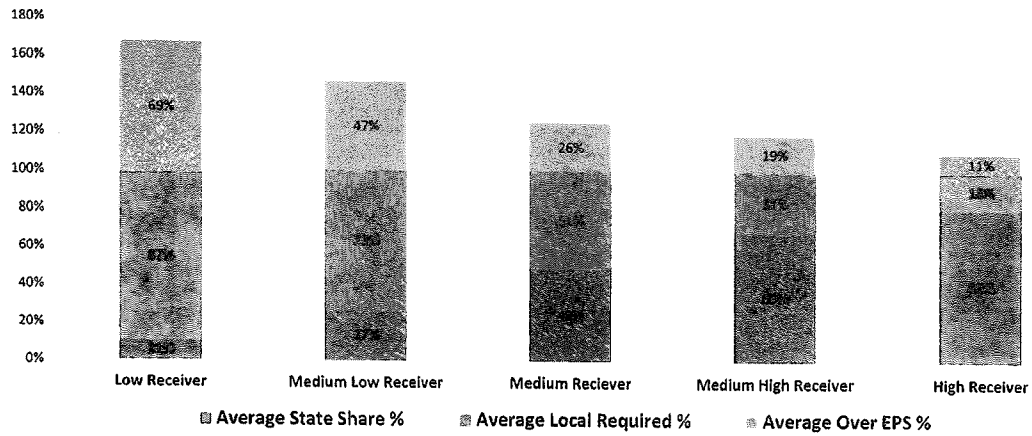
Thank you for your attention and your service to the people of Maine. I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.

FY 2022-2023 EPS Allocation Distributions by SAU



Note: SAUs in RED have received a "Minimum Receiver Adjustment" per the EPS formula.

FY 2022-2023 EPS Allocation Distributions by SAU



Low Receiver = 0-19% State Share Contribution

Medium Low Receiver = 20-39% State Share Contribution

Medium Receiver = 40-59% State Share Contribution

Medium High Receiver = 60-79% State Share Contribution

High Receiver = 80+% State Share Contribution