

Dr. Elizabeth Anne Eames
Lewiston
April 30, 2026

Sen. Rafferty, Rep. Murphy, Honorable Members of the Education & Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Elizabeth Eames, and I am here to **testify in favor of LD1579 "An Act to Abolish School Budget Referenda"** a bill proposed by Lewiston's own Representative Abdi.

I speak from the perspective of serving in my second term as Ward 3 Representative to the Lewiston School Committee. While I have been appointed their Legislative Liaison, the decision to come to the Cross Building today was my own.

For us, "Budget Season" began in late February, when we started having two meetings a week. Yes. I can assure you that spreadsheets and proposals always undergo strict scrutiny. The process gathers momentum over 10 or 12 weeks and by this Tuesday, City Council should approve our final negotiated version (at times a tricky moment because councilors have been known to apply pressure on *us* to help *them*). Our up/down vote is May 13th.

Our anxiety is palpable as that referendum date comes hurtling towards us. Why is it May 13th? No reason that I can discern. Is that tally aligned with anything that might generate some wide interest? Nope. How many folks will show up? Historically, 2% give or take a smidgen. This means our children's current and future well-being has been consistently dependent upon a few, very few, highly motivated individuals.

Last year, the budget failed & failed again. It finally passed on the *third* round. As it was getting late in the season, many LPS staff, understandably, applied for employment elsewhere. Moreover, as we negotiated the budget downwards, our children lost out on approximately \$5 million in special education renovation plans that got dropped. We cut and cut and cut some more. It was tragic, unnecessary, misguided.

Representative Abdi has already discussed the fiscal challenge of mounting a series of stand-alone referenda. I hope my testimony helps clarify that the compounding inefficiencies are legion.

I will add that the current incentive system strikes me as perverse.

The first perverse incentive is that the changing demographics in Lewiston lead some residents to resent the new arrivals' presence in our schools. But every child deserves care. Respecting the motto on the LPS website -- "All Our Kids Are All Our Kids" -- will only drive our city's long-term success. Too often, short-sighted voters short-change students.

The second perverse incentive is that the city budget is under no referendum pressure. At all. Lewiston's taxpayers may be furious, but they are not well-informed. Our referendum presents itself as the only available target, a *too-specific* vehicle for expressing *generalized* discontent. Sadly, our schools become collateral damage. I doubt any of this was intended by those who invented the school referendum.

You should seize this opportunity to short-circuit a runaway system and **vote "Ought To Pass" on L.D.1579**. Thanks for listening to my plea to simplify our lives by abolishing the school budget referendum process.