

***Testimony of Edward Polewarczyk on
LD 1586, An Act to Amend the School Budget Referendum
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs***

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education And Cultural Affairs: I am Edward Polewarczyk, from Wiscasset. I am here today to testify In Favor of L.D. 1586 An Act to Amend the School Budget Referendum.

The School Budget process is defined Title 20-A: Education, Part 2: School Organization, Chapter 103-A: Regional School Units, Subchapter 4: Financing.

The budget process begins with the superintendent creating a proposed budget for the coming school year. It is then presented to the School Committee for review with the opportunity for each of the Committee members to question the budget items. Eventually, after a number of work sessions, these budget items are approved by a majority of the School Committee.

A Warrant on the Budget Articles is then presented to the public in an open town meeting. Where each item can be questioned and eventually voted on by the registered voters at that meeting. Generally only the parents and teachers attend this meeting and of course all items are approved and any attempt to understand is discouraged. Most of the voters are unaware of this process and do not attend the open town meeting. Finally the proposed budget goes to the voters for validation.

On June 10, 2025, the voters of Wiscasset will go to the polls and be confronted with a 5 page ballot. Many have not seen this information before coming to the polls. They will choose among the candidates for members of the Select Board, members of the School Committee as well as other elected positions.

There will be 52 budget items for the voters to approve. They will vary from a little as \$1500 to as much as 1.3 million. The voter has the option to approve or reject each item. He knows what the value is and can decide whether it is reasonable or not. There is very little information provided but at least there is a value. This is followed by a number of questions dealing with ordinance changes.

Finally we get to the last page of the ballot and read the Question:

"Do you favor approving the Wiscasset School Department budget for the upcoming school year that was adopted at the latest Wiscasset School Department budget meeting?

YES NO"

There is no mention of the amount of this item. And yet this is the largest item in the Town's budget, accounting for approximately 70% of the property tax rate.

Many complain to the Town Clerk and the Select Board about there not being an amount.

The response is always "We must comply with the statute". The least we could do is be transparent and indicate the amount being approved.

I urge the members of the committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD1586 to include the dollar amount applicable to the specific school budget in the School Budget Validation Referendum.