

My name is Jaye Rich. I work for Lewiston Public Schools as a Prek-3rd-grade multilingual teacher, and I live in the town of Auburn, where I serve on the School Committee. I'm speaking today in support of the Governor's proposed two-year budget that maintains the state's commitment to fund 55% of public education.

For more than a decade, communities like Lewiston and Auburn have advocated for the state to meet this obligation. In 2022, that promise was finally fulfilled. This proposal would mark five consecutive years of the state honoring that commitment to Maine students.

From the classroom, I can tell you this: stability matters.

I teach young multilingual learners who are learning English while also learning how to read, write, and do math for the first time. Their success depends on consistent staffing, strong support services, readily available high-quality resources, and manageable class sizes. Tight budgets are not theoretical to us. They show up when intervention positions are reduced, when support staff is stretched thin, and when educators are asked to do more without additional resources or support.

With increasing uncertainty regarding federal funding, maintaining 55% funding for Maine schools allows districts to plan responsibly, instead of reacting to instability. Predictability is what allows us to protect the progress we've made— like Auburn's 97% graduation rate.

From a school committee perspective, this is also about taxpayers. Across Maine, school budgets are often the only part of municipal spending that goes directly to voters. When families are feeling the pressure of rising costs, that pressure shows up at the ballot box. If the state steps back from 55%, the burden doesn't disappear, but rather shifts to municipalities and local property taxpayers. Communities like Lewiston and Auburn simply cannot absorb that shift without major cuts or tax increases. Neither helps our students, educators, or residents.

I also want to briefly highlight the proposed \$5.9 million investment to retrofit approximately 2,300 Maine school buses with anti-pinch door sensors and/or crossing arms. As educators and school committee members, we are responsible for students' safety from the moment they leave home until they return. These upgrades are a practical, preventative investment in student safety and peace of mind for families.

Investing in our schools is an investment in our future and sends a clear message: Maine views public education as a shared responsibility and student safety as non-negotiable.

On behalf of my students and my community, I respectfully ask you to support this budget and continue the state's commitment to Maine's public schools.