



Maine Education Association

Jesse Hargrove President | Beth French Vice President | Jaye Rich Treasurer
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

Testimony

LD 2212: An Act Making Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027

Jesse Hargrove, President, Maine Education Association

Before the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

February 20, 2026

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and

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

My name is Jesse Hargrove, I am a high school social studies teacher on leave to serve as Maine Education Association President. The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators. Our members include teachers, school counselors, custodians, nutrition staff, transportation staff, and other school personnel in nearly every public school in the Maine, and thousands of retired educators. I stand here on behalf of MEA in support of LD 2212. In particular we support the Governor's support in funding 55% of the state's cost of Education and we strongly support incorporating a \$50,000 minimum teacher salary. We believe these commitments to public education will help secure our public schools.

The governor's commitment to 55% establishes the culture that the voters demanded decades ago but had been long denied. This comes as many of our school districts face increasing challenges providing equitable educational opportunities to Maine students. We know that zip codes have a tremendous influence on the ability of Maine communities to support education¹. Maintaining the 55 % funding sends the message that State leadership is intent on moving forward, supporting students across all corners of the state. Of course, there are still unmet needs in public education. We support creative revenue mechanisms to help remedy these ailments, however the Governor's proposed budget sends a message to future administrations and legislatures that we can support students and learning across this great state.

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Annual Teacher Retirements, 2015-2023 <i>Source: MEPERS</i>	
Year	Cumulative Annual Total
2015	880
2016	844
2017	842
2018	880
2019	916
2020	843
2021	821
2022	928
2023	824

When I first started teaching in the Early 2000s, there were over 100 applicants for any given social studies position. By 2010, that had fallen to the 90s, and in 2012 the 50s. A few years later, I was a department chair working with my building principal reviewing a scant 14 applications for 2 open positions. The declining educator labor force is supported by Maine Public Employees Retirement Data which suggests we lose around 1300 educators each year due to retirement and resignation. Retirements have consistently been between 820 and 920 per year over the last decade. However, the number of resignations has steadily increased over the same period. Additionally, we see a precipitous drop in the number of folks graduating from an education prep program, from over 800 to about 400. Just last year, I listened to stories from University of Maine Education Majors speak about the financial realities of a college education, student debt, basic living costs and how the insufficient salaries in teaching

Annual "Classroom Teacher" non-retirement Resignations, 2015-2023 <i>Source: MEPERS</i>	
Year	Annual Total
2015	223
2016	262
2017	232
2018	256
2019	310
2020	293
2021	398
2022	575
2023	525

were causing them to seek employment in other fields. A \$50,000 minimum starting salary says to our youth that the state is committed to making public education a viable career.

We know that our school communities have a variety of challenges. We would like to see increased mental health support for schools. Last year the Legislature passed LD 858, *An Act to Ensure Behavioral and Mental Health Services Are Available to Students by Providing Grants to Schools That Contract for Those Services*. The bill was submitted because some providers were forced to end programs in schools due to the lack of funding. This bill was designed to get these providers back into schools by providing grants to help cover the costs of these important counseling services. The program originally had a fiscal note of \$1.3 million but the Appropriations Committee was only able to fund \$100,000. We hope the Legislature will find additional resources to fully fund this program and get students the help they desperately need.



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Year	Students Graduating From an Educator Preparation Program
2011-2012	863
2012-2013	728
2013-2014	679
2014-2015	554
2015-2016	569
2016-2017	551
2017-2018	417
2018-2019	411
2019-2020	444
2020-2021	404
2021-2022	429

We support this collective exploring additional revenue streams and revamping the Essential Programs and Services model to help support our under-resourced districts reduce disparities. LD 1089 was carried over from last session and is very similar to the Stand Up for Students Ballot initiative that voters approved in 2016. These revenues could secure 55% funding into the future and address flaws in the current funding formula. However, we are grateful that the state has prioritized 55% funding for the past 5 years, paving the way for future improvements.

Thank you,

I'm happy to address any questions.

Jesse Hargrove
President, Maine Education Association

ⁱ Ray, Jeremy Ray, *Maine School Funding: The Zip Code Crisis How, Not Need, Determines Educational Investment*, February 3, 2026 Accessed February 19, 2026
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nHCEq-jJDyjVOR0Dqxb4eb1ubqNMEPnX/edit>