



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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March 9, 2026

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, Distinguished Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

My name is Will Tuell. I represent House District 10, a patchwork of small towns in central Washington County with high property values, low incomes, an aging population, and a tax base that is struggling to provide basic services, especially education. That is why I am here today to testify in support of LD 2226, "An Act to Amend the EPS School Funding Formula."

When we think about bills that come back every year, we think of bills to permit Sunday hunting, property tax relief, doing away with vehicle inspections, and many more.

One of the biggest – the holy grail if you will – is adjusting the Essential Programs and Services formula in a way that reflects the needs of a land rich, income poor, state.

I am heartened that this bill appears to have gathered some steam, and that we may finally be able to address one of the biggest issues around school funding – the need for income to be factored into the funding formula.

Coming from Washington County, I have learned firsthand how big promises to "fix" school funding often fall short. They start out with a lot of fanfare, great ideas are offered up, work sessions are held, studies are conducted, and the plot is lost for another two years.

When I first heard this bill was in the offing, I confess I felt the same way. Are we really going to have this 360-degree conversation again and punt the issue for another two years, while well-intended candidates promises slick fixes only to generate votes, a general outrage, and yet another delayed fix two years from now? Do we really think we're going to get there in the waning weeks of a second, politically charged session?

And yet, talking with folks in my school community – one of the most efficient schools in the state – and several of our colleagues here, I am pleasantly surprised to hear that we may in fact make structural changes to the system that could benefit the small, land rich, dirt poor towns I represent.

So here I am today, urging you to support LD 2226 because it will bring an estimated \$2.5 million in school funding to property tax laden Washington County. I am here today because it will help many of these towns from passing on even higher and higher education costs to the people that can least afford them, and I am here today because one of the central laments of folks down our way – that income is not adequately factored into the funding formula – is seriously considered.

More than that though, I am here because I am proud of Elm Street School in East Machias where I attended and learned the skills I needed to get where I am today; I am thankful for the education I received, and have stayed close with that school over the years because I believe that education truly is the great equalizer and that our small town rural kids can, if given the chance to excel, will do so.

While Elm Street holds a special place in my heart, there are schools throughout my district, such as the Alexander Elementary School, which do the same. Last fall, I had the honor of attending a 9-11 ceremony in Alexander where the entire school not only learned about the terror attacks that rocked this nation some 25 years ago, but came out to pay their respects to those who lost their lives that fateful day. That is the beauty of a small, community run school that puts the individual student first, that believes in a hands-on, grassroots education.

My district is made up of so many great schools, schools that are barely hanging on, doing the work that doesn't get headlines or much credit, and doing so while we sit here and run around in circles.

That is why I am here today, to ask your help, your support, and effort advancing LD 2226 across the finish line.

And if money is an issue, may I suggest this legislation would have more lasting, long term benefit than a one-time \$300 check.

Thank you!