



## AUGUSTA PUBLIC SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

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### **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF LD 2226**

Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
State of Maine Legislature  
Augusta, Maine 04330

#### **Testimony in Support of LD 2226** *Michael E. Tracy Jr., Superintendent, Augusta School Department*

Distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs: I am honored to appear before this Committee in strong support of LD 2226. While the Augusta School Department stands to benefit, my testimony is offered on behalf of students and communities across the entire State of Maine, and in the interest of honesty, equity, and fiscal transparency in public education funding.

#### **The cost of a T-Bone Steak**

Can you believe that the average cost of a T-bone steak in Maine has risen to roughly \$25–\$35 in 2026? Now imagine a friend offers to buy you a T-bone steak to grill this weekend. With your mouth watering, you eagerly agree.

However, you know your friend all too well, and that the total cost would never be covered by them. Soon after they call to let you know they'll cover 55% of the cost, since steaks are so expensive these days, and you agree to cover the rest. On their way over, they mention the total cost of the T-bone was \$28.00, which means your share comes out to \$12.60.

#### **The Funding Gap**

The State of Maine has, perhaps unintentionally, been providing the public with a misleading picture of how education is funded. The ED 279 formula, established in 2005, has simply not kept pace with the true and growing costs of education in Maine.

In the most recent fiscal year, actual education costs exceeded the formula's estimate by more than \$800 million. This means we are essentially misleading the people of Maine about the total cost of education. Local communities are contributing roughly 30% more, on average, than the formula recognizes. While the State communicates that it funds education at 55%, the true state share is closer to 44% against the total real cost. The difference is being borne, quietly and inequitably, by Maine's municipalities and local taxpayers.

This is not the result of bad faith, or the fault of any individual. It is an institutional problem that demands a legislative remedy.

#### **An Old Problem, Still Unresolved**

This inequity is not new. In 1894, State Superintendent Nathaniel Luce wrote with striking clarity about the relationship between geography, resources, and educational quality - observing that a child's opportunity was directly tied to their community's resources. He stated: "*While the character of the teacher is the largest factor in the efficiency of the school, that efficiency depends no small degree upon the tools in which the teacher and pupil are to do their work.*"

More than 130 years later, a student's educational opportunity in Maine remains heavily influenced by their zip code. Recently, in his publication, Superintendent Ray should be credited for writing a more thorough illustration of this fact. This concern is neither new nor unique to any single district.

It is a statewide concern.



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### **The Real-World Impact**

Prior to serving in Augusta, I was superintendent of a smaller rural Maine school district. Despite the dedication of staff and community, a nearby urban high school, 11 miles away, offered 48 more courses than we could provide. This was not a local failure, it was the product of a funding structure that doesn't account for the actual costs of delivering a comprehensive education in lower-wealth districts. In his 1894 annual report, Superintendent Luce observed that the smallest and most rural schools could not attract or retain the most capable teachers, and that the quality of instruction a child received was directly tied to the resources available in their community. He noted that children in less-resourced communities were, at times, excluded from schooling altogether due to the cost of materials. Today, due to the funding formula, I observe a very similar disparity in my current role, in Augusta. If the proposed budget that I recommend goes through for this coming year, we will reduce more than 20 positions in just 2 years time. Overall, a student in a rural or low-wealth community deserves the same breadth of opportunity as a student in an affluent district. The ED 279 was designed with that principle in mind, but it has not been updated with sufficient regularity to fulfill that promise.

### **The Ask**

I don't pretend to fully understand all of the competing interests at your level of government. However, I do understand the very real feeling of paying more than expected, much like in this example, where you would actually end up paying \$18.43, or 66% of the total cost of the T-bone steak. That is precisely what our local taxpayers are experiencing right now. While we continue to hear that ED279 is covering 55% of the cost, that simply is not the case.

The public schoolhouse is the great equalizer in American civic life. For that institution to fulfill its promise, the mechanism by which it is funded must be honest, up-to-date, and accurate.

I respectfully urge this Committee to support LD 2226, or a similar legislation to modernize the ED 279 formula, and move Maine meaningfully closer to the equitable education system its students and communities have long deserved.

Thank you. I am pleased to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

**Michael E. Tracy Jr.**  
Superintendent, Augusta School Department  
Augusta, Maine