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Testimony

In Support of

LD 566, “An Act to Address Labor Market Inequities in the School Funding Formula.”

Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan, Distinguished Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

My name is Will Tuell. I represent the communities of Cutler, East Machias, Eastport, Lubec, Machias, Machiasport, Roque Bluffs, Whiting and Trescott Township in the 130th Maine Legislature. I am here today to present **LD 566, “An Act to Address Labor Market Inequities in the School Funding Formula.”**

At its core, this bill attempts to recognize that every school district in Maine should receive a base level of funding for labor costs. While each labor market is different, and the cost of living in each is different, no school district should be receiving less than 100% -- especially while others are receiving more than 100%.

Many communities in rural Maine struggle to fund their schools the way the funding formula has been designed. The labor market adjustment only amplifies this as many of the areas Sen. Stewart, Reps. McCrea, Stearns and I represent, do not have the economic activity of our more affluent areas. They are also land rich, and so the cost of education falls more on the cash-strapped property taxpayer. So because the labor market is weaker, our schools get less of a subsidy than those where it is stronger.

This may be well intended, but it does not make sense as those who are suffering to pay for their schools are the least able to afford to do so.

This bill lifts everyone who is receiving less than 100% (or 1) in labor market adjustment to that mark over three years. It also unintentionally takes those who are receiving more than 100% down a 1.

That was not my intent, or that of those following me today when we put this bill forward. Our intent was to leave everyone over a 1 where they are at, and bring everyone else up to a 1.

I am under no illusions. This will cost a king’s ransom, but if we are truly going to help schools in economically depressed areas stay sustainable, attract quality workers, and provide a quality education for students in those areas, it is what needs to be done.

A solution similar to this is also going to be proposed by the Maine Education Association. While I will leave their testimony to them, one of the options they are laying out is increasing the floor from .80 to a .93. Ultimately, I would argue we need to get to a 1.00 everywhere, but doing this would be a good first step.

I won't comment on their other proposals and options at this time, but I have shared them with others in the field who are working on this legislation with me, and perhaps members might ask questions of my local school superintendent and others in the field who may be here to testify.

I want to thank you all for your attention, and perseverance through this Zoom session.

Thank you,

Will Tuell
State Representative