

TESTIMONY

In Support

LD 651: An Act To Stabilize Student Count in Maine's School Funding Formula

John Kosinski, Government Relations Director, Maine Education Association

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

April 13th, 2021

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

My name is John Kosinski, and I am here on behalf of the Maine Education Association (MEA) to testify in support of LD 651, An Act To Stabilize Student Count in Maine's School Funding Formula, as amended.

The pandemic has certainly created greater instability among the student counts in our public schools. As we all expected, this current school year saw a significant decline in student enrollment in public schools. Some families decided to keep their children home out of concern for the virus and may have moved to homeschooling. I know educators in our public schools are excited to get back to full in-person instruction for all students once it is safe to do so.

However, we can likely expect volatility in student counts for the foreseeable future, and while we appreciate the efforts proposed by the Department of Education for next school year to account for the fluctuations that are currently occurring, we encourage a common standard to account for the expected student count changes during this turbulent period and beyond. LD 651 is an attempt to create such a standard and uses the “sudden and severe” model as a solution. The current “sudden and severe” language allows for a smoothing out of dramatic property tax increases or decreases. This was a major issue in mill towns a few years ago as the paper industry struggled, and the value of the mills plummeted. More recently property values have become a major issue in southern Maine specifically where property values continue to climb at significant rates.

LD 651 applies a similar principle to student count fluctuations and attempts to provide a smoothing out of student count changes so districts can have more predictability and less volatility in state subsidy. This type of “circuit breaker” for student counts makes good policy sense too. The smoothing out of student count changes of a severe nature helps districts impacted by the sudden drop, without having a significant impact on the other schools in the state.

MEA encourages the Committee to vote “ought to pass” on LD 651 and I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.