

TESTIMONY

In Support

LD 1114: An Act To Require the State To Meet the Mandatory 55 Percent Contribution to Schools

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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 1114, An Act To Require the State To Meet the Mandatory 55 Percent Contribution to Schools.

We are so close, and we can finally do this.

The MEA is steadfast in our commitment to 55% state funding for our schools. Since voters passed this ballot initiative in a statewide referendum nearly two decades ago, the state has never met its obligation to Maine's voter or its students. The state is currently funding less than 52% of the cost of public schools, and next school year the contribution only increases by .05%. That said, the state has made a significant increase in its commitment since 2017 and we are grateful for those increases in state aid. In addition, we are within striking distance. We are currently just about \$100 million short of 55% state funding for our schools for next school year.

It is important to note the 55% state commitment for schools is the minimum we need to do for students. The funding formula is called the Essential Programs and Services – and the key word is essential. The funding formula is designed to be an adequacy model of funding schools and is intended to represent what students need to meet the Maine Learning Results. When the state is unable to fund its required 55% state contribution, property taxes are forced to rise. Putting more pressure on local communities only furthers inequities in our public education system.

Over the past few months this Committee has heard several bills to improve the school funding formula. More will likely be debated this session. For example, competing proposals to fix the labor market adjustments have been introduced and both will increase the cost of education. I think these debates simply underscore how woefully underfunded our public schools are and the need for our state to live up to the minimum that voters demanded in 2004 and then again in 2016.

Recently, this Committee has discussed the multiyear, nearly \$500,000 study of Maine's school funding formula, also called the Picus report. While this study showed Maine's school funding formula is among the most equitable in the country, the study also underscored how woefully inadequate our funding formula is for meeting the needs of students. In fact, after a review from the Picus firm, they concluded their "preferred model would raise the state's contribution to public schools by \$227.5 million a year and require \$32.7 million in additional local spending."¹ In fact, according to the experts from the Picus firm, our school funding model at 55% was still severely underfunded.

While LD 1114 calls for the state to finally meet its 55% obligation to schools in the 21-22 school year, we fully realize the funding for public schools has already been established for next school year in the state budget passed a few weeks ago. However, we hope we can all work towards the goal of finally funding our schools at 55% for the 22-23 school year, as the voters demanded in 2004. We expect supplemental budgets will be coming in the weeks and months ahead and hope we can finally meet the demands of voters, taxpayers and our students but finally realizing this goal.

Thank you for your time, your attention, and your service to the people of Maine.

¹ Please see: [Study of Maine school funding recommends additional \\$260 million \(bangordailynews.com\)](http://bangordailynews.com)