

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF LD 951

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School Superintendent  
Jonesport Beals Schools

Having served as a Superintendent in coastal communities, I can assure you that there is nothing that burns the ears of our local School Boards more than to hear the state continue to say that it is funding 55% of its obligation to public schools. Technically, that's true, but in reality, it's as far off the mark of the state's actual commitment as March in Maine is to springtime in Georgia. And every time they hear it, my Board members ask how anyone in Augusta can say that with a straight face and a serious tone of voice.

My school district is comprised of three schools, two elementary and one High School. Combined, the three schools are slated to receive \$570,192 for the 2023-2024 school year. The combined proposed budgets of the three separate schools are over \$5.7 million. So, yes, we are going to receive about 10% of the total cost of education from the state for the 2023-24 school year. The Essential Programs and Services funding formula does not include any funding for sports and none for a Superintendent or the central office.

The formula is driven primarily by the property values of the community and the enrollment of the school. There are some other token considerations but by and large, if you live near the ocean, you remain a minimum receiver. It's been that way in the thirty years that I've been a public-school administrator. The formula was conceived years ago using a "model" prototypical school with a model elementary enrollment of 250 students, middle school of 400 students and a High School with 500 students. Like so many schools in Maine, our schools are small, way under those numbers. We don't fit the formula, and I would venture to say most schools in Maine do not.

Our two towns of Jonesport and Beals have some of the most beautiful coastline in the entire United States. I live on the coast in neighboring Addison and am thankful every single morning that I wake up to sunrise over the ocean, granite and pines. My wife and I are so very fortunate to be here and to have the means to do so. That is just not true for so many of the towns' residents when one takes into account the median family income here.

The average household income in Maine is \$63,182. For Beals, that figure is \$53,750 and for Jonesport the figure is \$43,750. For comparison, the city of Augusta has a household income of \$57,458, not too far from the Beals average. Augusta received \$16 million in state funding for a school budget of \$35.6 million, or about 44%. A little higher family income and yet a bundle more in state funds because they live near a river, not an ocean. Beals gets 7%, Augusta gets 44%. How does that make any sense at all??

I do applaud the Governor for bringing the state level of funding for education up each and every year of her leadership. The formula, however, needs to be corrected to finally, and once and for all, acknowledge that family income is just as important as property valuation. Ability to pay has as much more to do with your income than it does with your location. Everyone knows that. It's truly not a difficult concept to grasp and it's high time the Legislature makes that fix to the formula. No more studies, no more blue-ribbon commissions. No more battles over spreadsheets. Do the right thing. You'll feel better, I promise.