

## TESTIMONY NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST

L.D. 1160—RESOLVE, DIRECTING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO CONDUCT A STUDY ON THE EQUITY OF THE STATE EDUCATION SUBSIDY FORMULA

L.D. 1402—AN ACT TO PROVIDE AN ADDITIONAL ALLOCATION IN THE SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA TO COVER TAX-EXEMPT PROPERTY OR A LARGE ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENT POPULATION

L.D. 951—AN ACT TO AMEND THE STATE EDUCATION FUNDING FORMULA TO CREATE EQUITY BETWEEN MUNICIPALITIES BY ADDING MEDIAN INCOME TO THE FORMULA

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Eileen King, deputy executive director of Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association, neither for nor against L.D. 1160, L.D. 1402, and L.D. 951.

The structure of the Essential Programs and Services funding model, while well intentioned, has promoted a continued growth in inequitable educational opportunities and disparities in resources across Maine's school districts. One only needs to visit schools across the state to see the differences in resources available to educate our children. The regional index that varies depending on where a school is located geographically does not consider that school districts will incur the same costs for textbooks, electricity, and a school bus. One Superintendent said it best: Our district is getting 89 cents on the dollar, and the district 20 miles down the road is getting 1.10, but a box of crayons cost the same. The EPS funding formula is tricky and when changes are made to one part of the formula, it impacts another part of the formula. Inevitably, two columns immediately appear defining the winners and losers.

L.D. 1160 directs the Department of Education to conduct a study on the equity of the state education subsidy formula. We support and applaud this effort.

L.D. 1402 calls for an additional allocation of school funding as it relates to the amount of tax-exempt property a town may have.

L.D. 951 proposes to amend the calculation used in determining a municipality's ability to pay for education to include median income, and that it would be given an equal weight to valuation.

While we support increased funding for school districts across the state, a change here or there to the Essential Programs and Services model will not address the inequities in funding that have grown over the years. At the end of the day, we ask, where does the money come from? Will one change in the funding formula impact another part of the funding formula and in the end, who will win and who will lose and what impact will the next change create?

Almost 20 years ago, Maine implemented the Essential Programs and Services model. Today, Maine school districts are addressing budgetary challenges because of increased valuation and a loss of economically disadvantaged subsidy, due to changes that were not present 20 years ago. We continue to leave millions of dollars on the table that should be going to support students due to the structure of and the challenges districts face in obtaining Medicaid reimbursement.

We welcome a statewide discussion to look at how our schools are funded, with a focus on how to fund our school districts equitably across the state but are neither for nor against isolated changes to our funding formula.