

Testimony in Opposition to LD 1001 2020-2021 Biennial Budget - Education

Senator Breen, Representative Gattine, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Adam Crepeau and I serve as the policy analyst at The Maine Heritage Policy Center. Thank you for the opportunity today to testify in opposition to LD 1001.

The Maine Heritage Policy Center (MHPC) opposes the substantial increase in appropriations to the Department of Education (DOE) in this budget. DOE will receive more than a 12 percent increase, more than any biennial budget increase in the past decade. While most would agree that education should be a priority in this state, there needs to be some level of accountability that accompanies spending.

This budget provides an additional \$126 million to K-12 education. MHPC is concerned that these funds will be spent without achieving desired outcomes. The last budget battle resulted in lawmakers agreeing to spend an additional \$162 million on K-12 education after Maine's first government shutdown since 1991.¹ Maine property taxpayers certainly did not see a commensurate \$162 million reduction in property tax liability, and there's no reason to believe the additional education spending in this budget will lead to a different result.² Merely throwing money at the public education system will not improve public education for Maine students.

This budget also provides for the increase in teachers' starting salaries from \$30,000 to \$40,000. An analysis by the Department of Education in 2017 showed that this initiative would cost approximately \$14 million annually.³ In this budget, \$10 million is spent in FY 2020-21 to fund this change. This proposal does not take into consideration the expectations of seasoned teachers who will want a pay increase once those entering the profession begin earning \$40,000 annually. Therefore, even if \$10 million covers the full cost of compensating all teachers at this rate, this change could necessitate additional property taxes increases in municipalities to fund this mandate.

This budget also spends \$7 million in FY 2020-21 for the initial phase of a four-year plan to establish a statewide Universal Pre-K program. According to the *Portland Press Herald*, a

¹<https://www.pressherald.com/2017/07/05/new-state-budget-sends-more-money-to-public-schools-in-maine/>

²<https://www.pressherald.com/2019/03/10/schools-expecting-more-state-money-but-property-taxpayers-wont-see-much-relief/>

³<https://www.pressherald.com/2019/03/04/three-bills-aim-to-increase-teachers-starting-pay-from-current-30000/>

Universal Pre-K program would cost approximately \$48 million annually⁴ if all families enrolled statewide. This will become expensive for both the state and possibly municipalities if legislation is passed to mandate that all school districts offer these services. In addition, research has shown that any advantages gained through preschool typically fades by the time children enter Kindergarten or first grade.⁵ Thus, not only is preschool expensive, but it is ineffective.

In closing, The Maine Heritage Policy Center is opposed to increasing spending by \$324 million for the Department of Education over the biennium. Doing so not translate to reductions in municipal property taxes or provide meaningful results for the Maine students. Thank you.

⁴<https://www.pressherald.com/2019/01/14/statewide-pre-kindergarten-programs-in-public-schools-gaining-momentum/>

⁵ <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED558006.pdf>