



FRIDAY: Referendum Initiative Takes Center Stage in Augusta

Teachers, School Board Members, Parents testify to keep voter approved Question 2 intact

WHAT: Dozens are expected to speak out against the Governor's proposed budget and in support of Question 2, the voter approved ballot measure that increases education funding for public schools. The Appropriations Committee, made up of lawmakers who help craft the state budget, will review the Governor's proposed budget on Friday. During the hearing the committee will focus on the portion of the Governor's proposed budget that eliminates the voter-approved special fund for education.

WHO: Teachers from around the state, including a building trades teacher from RSU 17 (Oxford Hills) who received notice last week he would be fired due to expected budget cuts because of the Governor's proposed budget. In addition, parents, school board and community members will attend and testify before the committee.

WHEN: Friday, February 10th, 10am

WHERE: Maine State House-Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, Room 228

BACKGROUND

Governor LePage's proposed budget eliminates the language that creates a dedicated fund to increase education funding. Voters approved the fund, which is expected to generate \$151.8 million more dollars for public schools in 2017-'18 through a 3% tax on household income earned over \$200,000. With the elimination of the fund, and the Governor's proposed change in tax structure the Governor's budget completely ignores the will of the Maine voters. Maine voters, at the ballot box, said they wanted to better fund our public schools and they wanted to pay for it with a tax on the rich. The fund to advance public kindergarten to grade 12 is already collecting money for schools, as mandated by Question 2. If the Governor's budget is enacted as is, with the elimination of Question 2 combined with additional funding cuts, public schools are expected to see a loss of more than \$200 million in funding. The figure is based on projections from the state, and can be found [here](#). * (See more detailed explanation below)

School Boards around the state are already creating their budgets for the coming year, planning on the expected cuts. In Oxford Hills, a buildings trade teacher has been told he will be laid off, citing the Governor's proposed budget as the reason why. This, at a time when the Governor noted in his State of the State address the importance of career and technical education.

"The Building Construction program is going to take a tremendous hit in quality," said Scott McElravy who teaches in RSU 17, Oxford Hills and was notified last week he will be laid off

due to budget constraints. “The number of students that can be safely and effectively served will be drastically reduced. The off-site experience of second and third year students will no longer exist. I am sincerely saddened to learn that a highly effective and quality program that I helped build and maintain for the past twenty-three years will be greatly diminished,” added McElravy.

The continued budget cuts due to reduced state funding and a shift in retirement costs from the state to the local level, combined with this new budget proposal will also impact programs offered to students in Augusta.

“The Augusta School Board closed two school buildings, we have combined administrative positions and increased responsibilities, we have eliminated multiple programs and choice for our students and reduced personnel in all departments. We can no longer function in this manner. There is no fat, we are scraping bone,” said Deborah Towle, an 8-year school board member for the Augusta School Department and a parent to 2 daughters in the public school system.

In Augusta, the 2017 proposed school budget has only increased by 4.2% since 2008. However, during that time inflation increased by nearly 10%. The increase in the fixed costs have not been met with increases in state aid. School Board members are speaking out to demand support for Question 2 to help ease the continued, and increasing burden on property taxpayers to make up for the difference.

“Question 2 was clearly approved by the voters in the State of Maine. There is no doubt that the proposal from our Governor clearly usurps the intent and the expectations of that vote. Reducing the tax expectations in order to offset the increase provided through Question 2 is a direct refusal to honor the will of the voters. Let me be clear in saying that tax cuts to our top income earner's will only result in a shift of the burden to local property tax payers,” said Kimberly Martin, Chair of the Augusta School Board.

“It is clear our students are suffering because of the continued budget cuts over the last few years. The Governor’s proposed budget this year is even worse because it undoes the will of the people by eliminating Question 2. It is time lawmakers listen to the Maine people and the educators who continue to support Question 2; it’s how democracy works. Our students deserve better,” said Lois Kilby-Chesley, president of the Maine Education Association.

Many city councilors across Maine are equally frustrated with the Governor’s budget and what it will mean for property taxpayers in their communities.

“As a City Councilor in Lewiston, I know first-hand that the state's shortchanging of local school districts has shifted the tax burden directly to our property tax payers. The education funding provided by Question 2, and approved by the voters, is a fair and common sense approach to make sure our schools have the resources they need without further burdening our local property taxpayers,” said James Lysen a City Councilor in Lewiston.

***Question 2 funding based on the calculations from the state as noted above:**

\$151.8 million in 2017-18 school year

\$43 million collected during the current school year

When you count the Question 2 funding, and add the \$9.6 million proposed reduction to the state contribution for education for the 2017-18 school year from current year in the Governor's biennial budget proposal, schools will be shortchanged by more than \$200 million.

FYI: All money collected from Question 2, by law, is to be collected and distributed to schools beginning in January of 2018.