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Testimony of Senator Chris Johnson Introducing LD 369  
An Act To Redesign Maine's School Funding Model  
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Good afternoon Senator Millett, Representative MacDonald, and fellow members of the Joint Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Senator Chris Johnson, representing State Senate District 20, in the Mid-coast region. I am pleased to sponsor LD 369 "An Act To Redesign Maine's School Funding Model".

This concept bill proposes a redesign of Maine's school funding to achieve equal educational opportunity for Maine students and statewide equity in property tax burden. Part 1 of the Picus report documented one inequity - that property-rich school districts have the means to provide more additional local funding (above and beyond Essential Programs and Services) than poorer districts, creating greater opportunities for students in affluent districts which are lacking in poor districts.

But there is also another problem which the Picus report does not drill into - how property tax levied by municipalities is a blunt revenue tool with no means of addressing the great disparities among residents in their ability to pay their property tax bill. From my research into the Vermont education funding model which Picus classifies as "Power Equalization", I know there are ways to address equity that are superior to Maine's current funding mechanism because they also address the previously stated problems.

Examining the overall issue of school funding, I see two distinct systemic challenges in answer to simple questions. And it is indeed possible to deal with them separately:

1. **How much funding is needed for a school district to provide a good education?** We must improve the Essential Programs and Services model so it better identifies realistic costs of providing a good education given the characteristics of the student population, their needs, and various practicalities of providing education given geography and population density/distribution in the school district.
2. **How should Maine raise the necessary school funding while providing equity across all communities in Maine and across community members of different means?** We must redesign the way Maine raises the revenues necessary to fund the costs of providing a good education which addresses the important inequities noted above.

It is the latter challenge which I am calling upon this committee to address by learning from the Vermont education funding model.

I would like to request that Picus and Associates be directed look to investigate the revenue side of education funding, focusing on equity and means of Maine citizens to pay. They should use Maine demographics, income data, property valuation data, and any other necessary data, to devise and adjust a revenue model adapting the key concepts of Vermont's education funding to suit Maine. I would further request that this bill be held over into the second session, so that the Committee can use the findings Picus generates, as requested above, in crafting language expanding upon this concept.

Thank you for listening, and I would be glad to answer questions.