20 June 2017

The 128th Legislature of the State of Maine
State House
Augusta, ME

Dear Honorable Members of the 128th Legislature:

Under the authority vested in me by Article IV, Part Third, Section 2 of the Constitution of the State of Maine, I am hereby vetoing LD 737, “An Act To Allow Public Schools to Reserve Funds Designated for Operating Costs.”

This bill seeks to create a slush fund for superintendents, enabling them to withhold our education funds from where they are most needed: in the classroom. As mayor of Waterville, I saw firsthand that superintendents know where to stash money for their pet projects, and this bill seeks to create a new hiding place to shield their spending from public awareness and scrutiny.

This bill is even being brought forward during a session where the constant refrain from the education special interests is that we are underfunding our schools. How is it simultaneously possible that our schools are “underfunded” for their operating purposes, but the superintendents have more than 3% of operating funds left over that they must carry forward? Something in this equation does not add up, and I will not be party to perpetuating such action.

If a community is withholding more than 3% of their operating expenses from their students, then I believe those excess funds should be returned to the taxpayer to lower property taxes.

Finally, I do not understand why this bill only targets expanded statutory only for school districts organized as SADs under 20-A MRSA §1312. I do not favor granting this for the four school administrative units that are SADs, but not for the majority for districts. On its face, that seems like bad policy.

For these reasons, I return LD 737 unsigned and vetoed. I urge the Legislature to join me in asking superintendents to stop playing games and put our education funds into the classroom by sustaining it.

Sincerely,

Paul R. LePage
Governor