

Honorable members of the Ways and Means Committee:

I write to you today not just as a 20-year educator, but also as a mother. Like many of you, I want the best for my children. My youngest daughter struggles with dyslexia, and every day I see the extra support she needs to succeed. Her third-grade teacher has 31 students, many of whom have IEPs, 504s, and others who are newcomers learning English. As a parent, I feel the weight of those challenges, but I also see them mirrored in my high school classes. Each child brings their own set of needs, and while I do my best to support them, it is increasingly difficult when resources are stretched so thin.

In Lebanon, we're in a better position than many districts across the state, and for that, we're grateful. While other districts will be forced to make cuts—rifing staff, reducing programs, and increasing already overloaded class sizes—we'll been able to avoid those extreme measures this biennium at least. But the reality is, the resources we have still aren't enough. Our town has grown dramatically over the past 20 years—our population has doubled, and housing prices have skyrocketed—but our schools have not seen the same kind of growth. We've opened no new schools, made no real increases to staffing, and our salaries and benefits haven't kept pace with the increasing cost of living.

The needs of our students continue to grow. All of our 10 schools are all Title I schools, with 18 percent of students having IEPs. We have more students who need emotional support, more students living in poverty, and more students who require specialized help. Yet, the funding we receive is not sufficient to meet these demands. We are asking our educators to do more with less—and we do. We go the extra mile for our students, then the second, then the third. But there's only so much we can do without the support we need.

What Lebanon needs is clear, and it isn't a fancy new football stadium or extraneous district administrators. We need a transitional kindergarten program to support our youngest learners, who enter school not yet potty trained. We need social-emotional learning classrooms in every elementary school. We need more mental health support in our secondary school as students encounter issues of addiction, depression, suicide, and houselessness. We need schools that are safe and conducive to learning, with roofs that don't leak when it rains. We need mentoring and professional support for our early-career educators, and most of all, we need smaller class sizes so that every child, whether like my daughter they needs extra instruction or like our many new comers who need help learning a new language, we must ensure they get the education they deserve. This is not just an investment in education, it's an investment in the future of my community.

I'm asking for your help—not just for Lebanon, but for all the students in this state who need you to act. Our community has done what we can, but we can't keep doing more with less. We need the state to meet us where we are, to ensure that our students and educators have the necessary resources.

Thank you for your time and commitment to our children's futures.