

## 132nd MAINE LEGISLATURE

## FIRST REGULAR SESSION-2025

**Legislative Document** 

No. 1162

H.P. 767

House of Representatives, March 20, 2025

Resolve, to Establish a Hybrid Juris Doctor Program at the University of Maine School of Law to Address Access to Justice in Rural Maine

Reference to the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs suggested and ordered printed.

ROBERT B. HUNT Clerk

R(+ B. Hunt

Presented by Representative FREDETTE of Newport.

- Sec. 1. Establishment of hybrid juris doctor program at University of Maine School of Law; report. Resolved: That, by the beginning of the 2027-2028 academic year, the University of Maine System shall establish at the University of Maine School of Law a hybrid juris doctor program, referred to in this section as "the program," that allows a student enrolled in the program to fulfill the degree requirements for a juris doctor primarily through online course work with periodic in-person instruction. The program must be designed to:
- 1. Prioritize the enrollment of students from rural areas of the State who demonstrate a commitment to practicing law in underserved communities in the State upon graduation;
- 2. Offer academic and professional training and educational opportunities to enrolled students that are the same or substantially equivalent to such opportunities offered to students enrolled in the school's traditional in-person juris doctor program;
- 3. Implement technology for use in the program that delivers high-quality, accessible online instruction to enrolled students;
- 4. Partner with law firms, businesses and community organizations to provide local mentoring, internship and employment opportunities for enrolled students; and
- 5. Be funded through a self-sustaining model that combines tuition revenue, including tuition payments from students enrolled in the program, with funding partnerships with local law firms, businesses and community organizations and any grants, private donations or state or federal funding available to support the implementation and operation of the program.

No later than January 1, 2026, the University of Maine System shall submit a report to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs outlining its plan for implementation of the program at the University of Maine School of Law by the beginning of the 2027-2028 academic year. The report must include, but is not limited to, a description of the rules, policies and procedures necessary for program implementation; a detailed timeline for program implementation, including development, faculty recruitment and student enrollment; an estimated budget for the program and identified funding strategies for ensuring program sustainability; and recommendations for necessary legislative or other action, including proposed legislation. After reviewing the report, the committee may report out legislation related to the report to the Second Regular Session of the 132nd Legislature.

33 SUMMARY

 This resolve directs the University of Maine System, by the beginning of the 2027-2028 academic year, to establish at the University of Maine School of Law a hybrid juris doctor program that allows a student enrolled in the program to fulfill the degree requirements for a juris doctor primarily through online course work with periodic inperson instruction.

Among other things, the program must be designed to prioritize the enrollment of students from rural areas of the State who demonstrate a commitment to practicing law in underserved communities in the State upon graduation; offer academic and professional training and educational opportunities to enrolled students that are the same or substantially equivalent to such opportunities offered to students enrolled in the school's traditional, in-

person juris doctor program; and implement technology for use in the program that delivers high-quality, accessible online instruction to enrolled students.

No later than January 1, 2026, the University of Maine System is required to submit a report to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs outlining its plan for implementation of the hybrid juris doctor program at the University of Maine School of Law by the beginning of the 2027-2028 academic year. After reviewing the report, the committee may report out related legislation.