

Testimony in Support of L.D. 512
An Act to Promote Student Enrollment and Degree Completion in the
University of Maine System by Providing Tuition Waivers to Eligible Students
Education and Cultural Affairs Committee
March 6, 2023

Sharon S. Tisher, J.D.

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Committee:

I would like to tell you why our UMS students deserve the support that L.D. 512 would provide, from the perspective of a non-traditional member of the UMaine faculty. * I started teaching at UMaine in 1994, after deciding to return to my home state of Maine and resigning from my position as a partner in Connecticut's largest law firm. I have taught Environmental Law and Policy, EES 324, every year since then, and soon after my arrival also joined the Honors College and have taught at all levels of the Honors curriculum as well. I retired from my faculty position last September, but continue to teach EES 324 as an adjunct, and to engage in various projects on campus.

I can't remember the name of the prominent antiwar activist in the 70's, who was interviewed a couple of decades later, and said that he now realized that if you want to make America a better place, you should "go teach in a public university." I endorse that notion. The country, now more than ever, needs the rich education in critical thinking, reading, writing, collaboration and problem solving that is embedded in all the disciplines that we teach. And our students need this experience to be *affordable*.

The open letter you received from economic researchers and instructors in economics underscores the social and economic benefits to the state to provide as much support as possible for higher education. I would like to more narrowly focus on lessons learned at UM through the Covid years. In this time, I have been tremendously impressed by our students, committed to getting the best education they could, overcoming numerous challenges and most specifically the challenge of being able to pay for it. I am sure you are aware that CNN did a story on UMaine's experience delivering education in the context of Covid, and held it out as a model

*These comments represent my personal views and I do not purport to speak for the University of Maine.

for the country: <https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/07/health/university-of-maine-covid-rates-low/index.html>. The recognition was well deserved, but obviously our success depended upon the care with which each and every one of our students approached their education: first, learning remotely with often inadequate internet resources and little quiet space, and, later, warding off the risks of in-person instruction, to themselves as well as to faculty and staff.

It has been a pleasure and an honor to have a second career teaching at UMaine. My students' performance over the decades has been remarkable. But there are too many instances where I know family resources are hard pressed to pay for their education. Show me a student with poor attendance or trouble completing assignments well and on time, and odds are you will find a student juggling one or two jobs or even three to make ends meet.

Together, the UMS administration, faculty, students and staff have crafted an outstanding collaborative and supportive environment to serve the needs of our collective future. It just needs one major improvement: to become more accessible to Maine's students.

Sharon S. Tisher, J.D.

Emerita Lecturer
School of Economics
and Honors College
307 Winslow Hall
University of Maine
Orono, Maine 04469

<https://umaine.edu/soe/tisher/>
[https://umaine.edu/climatechronology/
sharon.tisher@maine.edu](https://umaine.edu/climatechronology/sharon.tisher@maine.edu)

Resident of Orono