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TO: Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

FROM: Ben Harris

RE: In Support of LD 696, An Act to Bolster the Maine Teacher Residency Program

DATE: March 13, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Ben Harris, and I am both a parent of students and a principal of a school that has directly benefited from the Maine Teacher Residency Program. I am testifying in favor of LD 696 because I have seen firsthand the positive impact this program has on schools, teachers, and most importantly students.

I recognize that the million-dollar price tag associated with this bill is significant, especially in a time of budgetary shortfalls. However, I want to assure you this investment has the potential to strengthen our schools and support teacher development across our great state. The Maine Teacher Residency Program places preservice teachers in classrooms for an entire school year, providing them with invaluable hands-on experience. In return, the district provides a stipend that helps these future educators cover rent and educational expenses while completing their coursework.

As a parent, I have seen the benefits of this program in my own children's education. My daughters have had two teachers who began as teacher residents in their school, and both were hired by the same school upon completing their residency. Because of this seamless transition, these teachers were able to hit the ground running in their first year, already familiar with the school's culture, curriculum, and students. Talking with other parents, I found that they had no hesitation about their children being taught by a first-year teacher because the residency had allowed them to become a known and trusted presence in the school community.

As a principal, I have had the privilege of watching teacher residents grow into outstanding educators. In my nearly 25 years in education, the residents I have worked with stand out as some of the best preservice educators because they are the most hardworking and well-prepared preservice teachers I have encountered. Thanks to their full-year internship, they graduate with a deep understanding of what it takes to be an effective teacher. Additionally, for districts struggling with staffing shortages, this program serves as a crucial pipeline for developing and retaining high-quality educators.

Funding this program will allow it to expand to more school districts, particularly those experiencing high rates of staff turnover. Education is one of the few professions where interns are still expected to work without pay. In contrast, a friend of mine in law school is completing a full-year paid internship, and fire science students at Southern Maine Community College receive free housing and paid experience while serving in local fire stations. If we truly value education, we must invest in our future teachers the same way other professions invest in their workforce.

I urge you to support LD 696 to strengthen our schools, support our teachers, and ensure that all students in Maine have access to well-prepared educators. Thank you for your time and consideration.