

Testimony of the Maine Association of Independent Schools

In Support of

**LD 974, Resolve, to Increase the High School Graduation Rate by Creating the Maine Promise Initiative**

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

March 26, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Daniel Walker with Preti Flaherty, and I testify on behalf of the Maine Association of Independent Schools (MAIS) in support of LD 974, **Resolve, to Increase the High School Graduation Rate by Creating the Maine Promise Initiative.**

MAIS 23 members are a diverse group of educational institutions, including Maine's earliest secondary school (Berwick Academy) dating to the 18th century with charters signed by Governor John Hancock, as well as much newer schools, schools with varied missions, schools which serve primarily public-tuition students, and one sectarian school. MAIS schools educate about 9000 students in pre-K through Grade 12, with 4600 publicly funded and 4400 privately funded. What all MAIS schools have in common is their accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

I first want to thank Rep. Brennan for bringing forward this resolve and the important issue of increasing high school graduation rates. Rep. Brennan importantly focuses on not only generally increasing the rate to at least 95% across the state but also focusing on identified populations of students that are historically below the current graduation rates, including unhoused students, Native American students, students in the child welfare system, and students in the juvenile justice system.

The Resolve directs the Department of Education to convene a working group of interested stakeholders to develop a strategic plan to implement the initiative and achieve its goals. MAIS schools would like to be part of the diverse array of stakeholders tasked with accomplishing this important work.

In many communities in Maine, the MAIS schools are developing and implementing strategies to retain a vast range of students, allowing them to thrive straight through until graduation. Many MAIS schools bring a different perspective to tackling the same challenges of resources, community partnerships, coordination with local and state programs, and personnel.

Again, thank you for bringing this important legislation forward, and MAIS would like to be part of the solution.

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