

## LD 1219-Testimony

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and other members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Lisa Feldman. I am a University of Maine System retiree who lives in Orono. I am submitting testimony in support of LD 1219, An Act to Increase State Funding for the Campuses of the University of Maine System and to Raise the Minimum Hourly Wage for Employees of the System.

I loved the 15 years I spent working with UMA-Bangor's feisty, 'non-traditional' students—many of them not just the first in their families but the first in their social circle attending college. It was rewarding but labor-intensive. One small example: In high school, you are given textbooks; in college you buy them. This is news to many of our students. For them, this large un-budgeted-for expense, coming during the first week of classes, is not just a practical obstacle but a source of crippling humiliation.

Our mission-driven campus joined forces to tackle the problem. We asked faculty to assign older editions of standard textbooks when possible. Used copies cost less. We put copies of textbooks on reserve at the library. We set up a free lending library for textbooks, and encouraged graduating students to donate to it. We made life a little better for our students, but it took planning, communication, and work. And it took the kind of understanding of students that only comes with respect, trust, and in-depth, one-on-one interactions.

University System appropriations have been declining for decades: The State share of UMS funding has plummeted from 70% to 40% in the past 35 years. A campus like UMA-Bangor can't replace the lack of State funding with the overhead on research grants. Doing more with less is a good mantra, but without resources, at some point, you realize that you're just doing less.

In education, the major resource is people. Because at entry levels UMS pays so poorly, it's hard to recruit qualified staff. Once they develop skills marketable elsewhere, it's hard to keep them. Staff vacancies and constant turnover sap morale and make it hard to maintain a consistently high level of service. Loss of institutional memory results in inefficiency and waste.

LD 1219 would not just give the University of Maine System an infusion of necessary cash. It would set up an objective, equitable, and workable principle for the internal allocation of funds. It would set up an objective and equitable minimum for wage rates, one that would be regularly adjusted for inflation. We know that this kind of minimum tend to exert upward pressure on wage scales as a whole.

LD 1219 is an important and much-needed piece of legislation. I urge you to support it.

Lisa Feldman  
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LD 1219

Please see testimony attached.