

Dear Senator Pierce, Representative Graham, and the members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I'm submitting written testimony to ask that you support 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.

As a faculty member in the School of Social Work at the University of Southern Maine, I can attest to the absolutely essential role our universities play in preparing students to make meaningful contributions to the workforce in Maine. Without universities, there are no social workers, there are no nurses, there are no teachers, there are no engineers.

Our universities need to be funded. Budgetary constraints impact every aspect of the work and learning that takes place at our universities: from compensation to facilities maintenance.

Many of my staff colleagues do not earn a living wage, especially considering the rising costs of living in Portland and its surrounding areas. My staff colleagues report working from home in order to lower their commuting costs, and accessing local food pantries to supplement their grocery purchases. My staff colleagues deserve to be fairly compensated for the excellent work they do supporting our students and faculty. The universities cannot function without them, and their compensation should reflect the essential nature of their contributions to our universities and communities.

In terms of the impact of budget constraints on facilities, I've included a photograph of the ceiling in the bathroom next to one of my classrooms this semester. You'll notice extensive damage to the ceiling tiles and walls from roof leaks. When utilizing this bathroom stall on snowy days in the winter, water literally fell onto my head from the ceiling. The students, staff, and faculty of our universities deserve better.



I know that legislators must make difficult decisions about how to allocate extremely limited resources, but our universities are the best possible investment in Maine's future. Thank you for supporting LD1219.

Sincerely,  
Rachel Casey  
Associate Professor of Social Work  
University of Southern Maine  
Resident of Gray, Maine