

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

My name is Jono Anzalone, and I have had the privilege of serving as a lecturer at the University of Southern Maine since 2020. I live in Portland, and I am here today to testify 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.

At the University of Southern Maine, many of our students are first-generation college students from low-income, rural, and immigrant backgrounds. They work hard to overcome significant financial challenges, but Maine's rising cost of living makes it difficult for them to thrive. In fact, the cost of living in Maine increased by 6.5% in 2022, well above the national average (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). This financial strain forces many students to take on significant debt or work multiple jobs, often leaving them with little time or energy to focus on their studies. Research shows that nearly 50% of Maine college graduates leave the state within five years due to the high cost of living (Maine State Chamber of Commerce, 2023), contributing to Maine's ongoing struggle with workforce retention.

The low wages paid to our faculty and staff further exacerbate these challenges. Many of our hourly employees earn minimum wage or slightly above, which is not enough to cover basic living expenses. The MIT Living Wage Calculator estimates that a single adult in Portland needs to earn \$18.10 per hour to meet basic needs, yet many of our staff make far less (MIT Living Wage Calculator, 2023). Additionally, faculty salaries in Maine are 12% lower than the national average, making it difficult to recruit and retain top talent (AAUP, 2023).

LD 1219 is a critical step toward addressing these issues. By increasing state funding for the University of Maine System and ensuring that funding reaches the campuses directly, we can help alleviate the financial burdens faced by both students and employees. Moreover, the bill's provision to raise wages for hourly employees to at least 125% of the state's minimum wage is vital to ensuring fair compensation for the essential work they do.

Investing in education yields significant returns. According to human capital theory, each dollar spent on higher education generates an estimated \$4.50 in increased tax revenue and economic activity (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2020). For Maine, every dollar spent on higher education returns more than \$3.00 to the state's economy (Maine Center for Economic Policy, 2022). Higher education boosts productivity, reduces reliance on social services, and strengthens Maine's workforce—key drivers of long-term economic growth.

I urge you to support LD 1219. This bill is an investment in Maine's future, ensuring that our students, faculty, and staff can succeed and contribute to a thriving economy. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Thank you for your consideration!

Jono

References:

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