

Nola Prevost
Brewer
LD 1219

Dear members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,
My name is Nola Prevost and I'm an alumnae and now an administrative specialist at the University of Maine in Orono. Over my short 2 years in this position, I have worked to support a number of departments, primarily the departments of English and Psychology. Many offices on campus, including these two, have had to downsize their staffing due to budgetary concerns especially with this current economic situation we're in. This past December, after my coworker in the Psychology department retired at the age of 74, instead of refilling the position, it was cut entirely. To make up the loss of labor, my position was abruptly rewritten to include a portion of her work in exchange for my time in the English department, suddenly taking me out of a part of the community I had come to love. Not only that, it forced both departments to go from having 2 administrative personnel, to 1. Staffing shortages have led to all of our operations slowing down considerably, and what's to be expected when an office cuts its workforce in half? Hiring freezes have made our already lengthy hiring process even longer by forcing departments to go through extra layers of approval just to make sure we even have the money to hire the positions that are sitting vacant often for months if not years. And that's just the start of the issues that arise when our education system doesn't receive adequate funding.

One thing that's even more important than how funding issues impact administrative staff is how it impacts the students and faculty. After losing our ability to hire TAs or work-study students some years back due to budget constraints, my position has also been forced to take on the role of proctoring exams for our General Psychology classes. And with 200-300 students per semester in just those sections, one exam can take up several hours of my time. But to be honest, even though job creep is real, I don't mind helping out our faculty to make sure that our students have a good experience in college. No, what truly bothers me the most is when I saw a student come in a few minutes late to an exam, only to find that the only chair left in the auditorium had a broken desk. The professor and I tried to look around the space for any sort of an alternative option for him, but when we couldn't find anything, the professor resorted to handing the student a cardboard box to put on his lap. A CARDBOARD BOX. I just stood there and thought, "This student is paying thousands of dollars just to be here, and THIS is the experience he is getting?" That's just unacceptable.

And that's just one example of one student in one exam. The amount of times I have heard students, faculty, and alumni of all sorts complaining about just the maintenance of facilities alone is laughable, let alone the pains of staffing shortages felt across campuses. I'm the one in my department that people tell those sorts of complaints to, and when one day a prospective student came to me asking for some simple information about her transfer credits, and I couldn't help her after she had already been unable to get in touch with the transfer and admissions offices due to them being short staffed, she said to me something that has stuck with me all this time, "If I can't get help with this one simple thing, how am I supposed to trust that I can get the help I need when I start classes there full time?" I couldn't disagree with her. No one deserves for this to be their experience of the University of Maine.

LD 1219 is a beneficial bill for a few reasons, but the one I want to highlight is that it helps to make sure that state funding goes as close to the students as possible, rather than being siphoned out by the central system.

This and all the reasons above are why I urge you to vote in favor of LD 1219 to give our state's higher education system the resources it needs to solve these issues and get back to doing what we do best: educating the next generation.

Thank you.