

Matthew Scandura
Orono
LD 1533

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

My name is Matthew Scandura and I work at the University of Maine Orono Campus as a research assistant. I also live in Orono. I am writing today in support of LD 1533, An Act to Ensure the Retention of R1 Research Institution Status by the University of Maine. I am testifying in support because the entire reason I am living and working in this state today is that I wanted to do biological research at the University of Maine. Before this, I had a stable and decent paying research job in Arizona. Before that, I was living in Maryland, a hotbed for biomedical research. But I chose to come here because the research I wanted to do was being done at this university and by my advisor, Dr. Joshua Kelley.

I came here with \$10,000 in my bank account. Today, not quite 3 years later, that account is nearly empty, and I'm living month-to-month to pay rent and pay off the credit card debt that I did not come here with, but nonetheless now have. That is because what I'm paid is well below the cost of living for the Orono region. Today over 54% of my monthly pay goes toward paying rent and utilities. That is the cost I pay to live somewhere that is safe and within walking distance of campus, since I don't have a car and can't afford one. And I should make clear that my stipend is supplemented by my department to be above to University's minimum, meaning many graduate researchers are paid far less than I am.

Right now I'm studying at UMaine as a Masters student. I've often been asked by professors and colleagues if I'd ever consider transitioning into a PhD- which is of course the kind of degree the university needs to award a certain amount of in order to maintain R1 status. And the simple truth is, the thought of trying to live here for maybe 3 more years on a grad student stipend is really scary. And I know I'm not the only one it's scary for. I think if the University wants to be attractive to PhD students, there needs to be more funding to support them. It almost feels too obvious to be worth saying, but if we can't be paid enough to live here, how can we be expected to study here? Or do research here? Or teach classes here? If the University wants to maintain its R1 status, it needs to be attractive to potential PhD students. I can tell you personally that increased funding for graduate students would certainly make me reconsider getting my PhD, and I think it would do wonders to attract new students in the future. As such, this bill is a necessity and a no-brainer if UMaine hopes to maintain its status as an R1 institution.