

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

My name is Joey Ka-Yee Essoe, I teach psychology at the **University of Maine at Farmington (UMF)** and live in Strong, ME. I am writing **in strong support of LD 1219**, which would restore a basic 4% funding increase to the University of Maine System (UMS), route those funds directly to the campuses that spend them on students, and lift the poverty-level wages still paid to many hourly staff.

1. UMF's unique public-service mission

- UMF is **Maine's only designated public liberal-arts university** and a founding member of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges. It was created to offer the breadth of a private college at a price working families can afford (ref: [COPLAC](#)).
- **Franklin County is rural and poor**: 13.6 % of residents live below the poverty line, well above the state median (ref: [Census.gov](#)), with only 29.9% of adults over 25 hold a bachelor's degree.
- The **nearest alternative UMS campus is in Augusta, nearly 40 miles / 45 minutes away** – an impossible daily commute for students without cars (ref: [Travelmath](#)).

2. Who our students are

- UMF deliberately educates those most at risk of being left behind. Nearly **one student in two is first-generation** university-goer, and a large share qualify for **Federal Pell Grants** (ref: [University of Maine at Farmington](#)).
- Unlike flagship and metropolitan campuses, **we have no large alumni donor base** and cannot shift costs onto wealthier out-of-state students without abandoning our mission. Like our staff and faculty body, our alumni tend to be educators, frontline mental health professionals, and working class people who *choose* to stay and serve our community rather than pursuing high-paying jobs in wealthier areas.

3. Why flat funding hurts

Over the past decade we have been told to “run like a business.” In practice that means:

- cutting low-enrolment courses that rural communities actually need;
- increasing class sizes and cancelling high-impact learning experiences;
- leaving student-support and counselling posts vacant for lack of salary dollars;
- pressuring departments to recruit simply for revenue, not educational fit.

Expecting a public university that serves a low-income catchment to **“turn a profit” is like asking the local fire brigade to show a surplus before it puts out fires**. Education here is not a luxury; it is the engine of regional renewal.

4. What LD 1219 will change

- A **4 % base appropriation** barely matches inflation but will stave off the next round of cuts and tuition hikes.
- Channeling money **directly to campuses** lets faculty and staff decide how best to serve their own students.
- A **minimum wage of 125 % of the state floor** means our cleaners, grounds crews and dining-hall staff can afford groceries without turning to state assistance—surely a moral baseline for any public institution.

I respectfully urge you to vote “Ought to Pass” on LD 1219 and to ensure that at least the same 4 % increase is included in the forthcoming supplemental budget.

Thank you for considering the realities of rural higher education in Maine. I would be happy to supply further information at the Committee's convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Joey Ka-Yee Essoe (劉家宜), Ph.D. [[CV](#)] [[Web-Research](#)] [[Web-Writing](#)]

Assistant Professor of [Psychology](#), [University of Maine at Farmington](#)

Ka Yee Essoe
Strong, ME
LD 1219

Please see my attached letter of testimony. I am unfortunately not able to testify on zoom or in person as I will be teaching during the hearing. Thank you for considering this bill and my letter.