

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

My name is Pamela Proulx-Curry, and I live in Old Town. I am submitting written testimony today 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

I am an Analytical Chemist. I received my Bachelor's degree from the University of Maine and have served as Assistant Professor of Chemistry at the University of Maine at Machias and Associate Professor of Chemistry at Unity College. I have also served as Academic Dean at Eastern Maine Community College and Dean of the Bangor Campus and Assistant Provost for Community Outreach & Development at the University of Maine at Augusta. I also served as Executive Director of the Wisconsin Campus Compact (WICC), a non-profit organization whose mission was to promote, and help build capacity for, community-based learning and research in Wisconsin's colleges and universities where I had the opportunity to closely observe the practices at the 32 institutions of higher education served by WICC. I am also the parent of two offspring who also graduated from University of Maine System institutions. I have experienced higher education from a multitude of perspectives and fully appreciate the multiple challenges that colleges and universities face and create. I've also have experienced the multiple benefits that they provide, not only to individuals, but also to individual communities, to the state as a whole, and to the world in general. Money spent on education is an investment that provides rich returns.

The Chinese philosopher, Guan Zhong, said, "The best investment for one year is to grow grains; the best investment for ten years is to grow trees; the best investment for a lifetime is to educate people." Education equips people to be self-sufficient, positively contributing members of society. It creates social capital that helps increase a community's resiliency.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data consistently show that, in terms of dollars, education makes sense. For the individual, higher levels of education lead to higher earnings. The impacts of education on a community's economy is also positive. Education significantly impacts economic growth by increasing individual earnings, fostering a more productive workforce, and boosting overall economic productivity through innovation and technological advancements. A well-educated population leads to less unemployment, greater tax revenue, and a reduction in reliance on public assistance programs. Investment in higher education provides significant return on investment at multiple levels.

If Maine is to thrive economically as a state we **must** invest in higher education, and that includes the salaries on university staff. Staff play a critical role in sustaining a high-quality institution. High quality staff (the kind needed to sustain a high-quality institution) are not attracted low paying jobs. If we want our universities to remain

competitive and produce graduates who are competitive and capable of generating innovative and economically productive companies and communities, then we must provide them with competitive support. Competitive staff salaries and competitive financial support for university operations are essential to maintaining viable and production higher ed institutions. I urge you to vote in favor of this bill. Thank you.