

TESTIMONY OF BRENDAN MCQUADE

In Support of LD 1219 – Ought to Pass

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

Submitted to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
April 24, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit public comment today. My name is Brendan McQuade. I am an associate professor and chair of both the sociology and criminology departments at the University of Southern Maine. I submit this comment in my capacity as union representative on the executive board of USM's AFUM chapter.

I am here to express my unequivocal support for LD 1219. This is not just a budget bill. It is a referendum on whether Maine will continue down the path of austerity, erosion, and privatization—or begin to reinvest in its public institutions, in its students, and in the intellectual and ethical capacities of its people.

The effects of disinvestment are everywhere: crumbling infrastructure, increasing tuition, and demoralized faculty juggling ever-growing workloads. I now chair two departments not because of any administrative ambition but because faculty lines have vanished and promising scholars have left for institutions with stronger support and better pay. We have been told for years to “do more with less.” We are now doing *everything* with nearly nothing.

This crisis is especially acute in programs like criminology, where we sustain an international and critical profile that is both unique within our discipline and disproportionate to the resources of an institution like USM. Despite chronic underfunding, our faculty maintain a level of scholarly productivity that exceeds expectations, and our graduates go on to work throughout the criminal legal system in Maine—in public defense, corrections, youth services, and community-based alternatives to incarceration. In the 1990s and early 2000s, when the department was fully staffed, we offered international travel courses to Sweden, allowing students to study and tour a criminal legal system grounded in humanist and rehabilitative

principles. Is it merely a coincidence that the much-celebrated “Maine Model of Corrections” bears striking resemblance to these Nordic approaches? These innovations don’t emerge in isolation—they are seeded by robust public education and cultivated by world-class faculty. Current and retired members of our department are nationally and internationally recognized for their work in environmental criminology, comparative criminology, gender and crime, childhood studies, Balkan studies, policing, and surveillance. That we have maintained this level of excellence under austerity is a testament to our commitment. But commitment alone cannot sustain a program—investment is required.

Underinvestment, moreover, is holding back faculty development to the detriment of students. We currently have a part-time faculty member prepared to recreate our travel course and begin new initiatives in prison education. She has the experience, the vision, and the connections to bring in external grant funding. But because she is classified as part-time—an exploitative position born of budget cuts—she cannot run grants through the university. That is a concrete example of what’s lost when we allow public higher education to be starved and dismembered: transformative programs with real-world impact, abandoned for lack of minimal structural support.

LD 1219 is an essential corrective. It mandates direct investment in the campuses where learning and mentorship actually happen. It includes a modest but necessary wage floor for hourly employees, who keep our institutions running while being chronically undervalued. This is not a radical bill. It is the bare minimum required to stop the bleeding.

I urge the legislature to pass LD 1219 and begin to repair the damage done by years of disinvestment. Let this be the moment we stop the decline and recognize that higher education is a universal public good with unambiguous value—on its own terms! If we want an informed public, a just society, and a humane politics, we must fund higher education.

Sincerely,
Brendan McQuade

Executive Board Member
Associated Faculties of the University of Maine
USM Chapter