

Paul Johnson
Brunswick
LD 1219

Dear, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and other members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Paul Johnson, and I work at the University of Southern Maine in the School of Social Work. I'm submitting written testimony to ask that you support 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.

In my capacity as a faculty member within the University of Southern Maine's School of Social Work, I can confirm the critical role our universities play in preparing students for meaningful contributions to Maine's workforce. The absence of universities would result in a deficiency of social workers, nurses, teachers, and engineers.

University funding is a critical need. Financial limitations affect all facets of academic work and study at our universities, from faculty compensation to infrastructure upkeep.

A significant portion of my colleagues earn less than a living wage, particularly given the escalating cost of living in and around Portland. Staff members report that working remotely reduces commuting expenses and that utilizing local food banks supplements grocery shopping. The excellent work performed by my staff colleagues in support of our students and faculty necessitates appropriate compensation. The vital role these individuals play in university functioning necessitates that their compensation be commensurate with their essential contributions to the university and the broader community.

Budgetary limitations impacted the School of Social Work's facilities during the 2023-2024 academic year, necessitating relocation from their Masterton Hall basement offices due to flooding and mold growth. The offices required extensive cleaning by campus facilities, a process that extended over several months. Despite these efforts, a number of my colleagues still report breathing and health issues due to the air quality in the basement of Masterton Hall.

I know that legislators must make difficult decisions about how to allocate extremely limited resources, but our universities are the best possible investment in Maine's future.

Thank you for supporting LD1219.

Sincerely,

Paul Johnson

Professor of Social Work
University of Southern Maine
Resident Brunswick, Maine