

April 24, 2025

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

My name is Kathryn Stiefel, and I am a constituent from Farmington. I work at University of Maine at Farmington as an instructor of special education. I am writing to you all today to testify 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.

Getting to teach at UMF is truly a dream job, and I chose to begin my academic career here because of the close-knit community. As a new faculty member, I have quickly recognized the dedication among my colleagues to providing a high-quality educational experience for our students, and the funding outlined in this bill is crucial to sustaining these efforts. UMF has a long and distinguished history of preparing highly effective teachers for Maine's schools, and LD 1219 is essential to ensuring this crucial mission continues strong. Investing in UMF's ability to prepare future teachers is an investment in the future of Maine's education system, ensuring that we can continue to produce knowledgeable, skilled, and dedicated individuals who will shape the next generation of learners. The funding proposed in this bill will directly benefit our teacher education programs by providing crucial resources for student teaching placements, access to current educational technologies, and the ability to support our experienced education faculty. As a new member of the faculty at UMF, I am enthusiastic about contributing to the university and the western Maine community, and this bill will provide the necessary foundation for me and my colleagues to do so effectively.

By supporting UMF's teacher preparation programs, this bill directly addresses the ongoing need for skilled and dedicated educators in Maine, especially in the rural communities of western Maine where

our graduates often serve. Maintaining affordability and quality at UMF, supported by the funding in this bill, ensures that higher education remains accessible to students in western Maine who may otherwise face significant barriers. Beyond maintaining affordability for students, this bill will enable UMF to maintain opportunities for students to engage in research, internships, and community-based learning experiences, providing them with valuable real-world skills and enhancing their future employability. A well-funded UMF fosters a thriving campus community through a variety of extracurricular activities and support services, enriching the overall student experience and contributing to their holistic development. By ensuring UMF's financial stability, this bill provides students with the assurance that their educational investment will be met with consistent high-quality instruction and resources throughout their academic journey.

The benchmarking of funding against peer institutions, as outlined in this bill, is a sensible and equitable approach to ensuring that UMF receives the resources necessary to compete and thrive. In conclusion, I urge you to recognize the profound positive impact this bill will have on the University of Maine System, its students, as well as our communities across the state -- and to vote in favor of its passage. Thank you for your consideration and support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'KSS'.

Kathryn S. Stiefel, Ph.D.

Instructor of Special Education
Division of Secondary and Special Education
University of Maine at Farmington
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Kathryn Stiefel
Farmington / UMF
LD 1219

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