

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 Wage for Employees of the System*

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

My name is Lydia Savage and I am a Portland resident, a professor of geography at the University of Southern Maine, and President of the Associated Faculties of the Universities of Maine representing over 1000 fulltime faculty at 7 universities across the state in the University of Maine System. I offer this testimony today on behalf of the AFUM and MEA 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 Wage for Employees of the System*.

This bill does three important things. First, it proposes to increase the state appropriation for UMS. State appropriations have declined since the System was created and increasingly, the universities rely upon tuition, auxiliary services and philanthropy to pay their bills. Tuition can only go so far and while we support the free community college program, it has affected our 7 universities. Increasing student debt or taking longer to graduate and becomes the logical result of decreased state government investment in our universities.

And I would be remiss not to raise our deep concerns if at least a 4% increase is not included in the next supplemental budget. The Governor proposed a 4% increase in her proposed budget but with the passage of the continuing services budget, UMS will not even be funded for that increase as it maintains status quo funding for the next biennial budget (beginning July 1, 2025).

Secondly, the bill also requires the funding to flow directly to the seven universities to make sure this funding goes as close as possible to the students. The current UMS funding formula provides that 30% of new appropriations to UMS be allocated to the System office. Our individual university budgets are required to be balanced by the Board and the System, often with no increase in appropriations and increasing costs and yet are all funded below that of our peer institutions. To remain competitive, we need investment in lab spaces, equipment and staff and faculty.

Finally, the bill also requires the UMS to pay all hourly employees at least 125% of the state's minimum wage. Too many of our staff members rely upon Maine Care, SNAP and other programs to get by. The University of Maine System should be a place where people can earn a decent standard of living and not need to rely upon multiple jobs and public safety net programs to just live month to month.