



Testimony By Jason Judd, Executive Director, Educate Maine and Member of ReadyNation
Before The Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint
Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

In Support Of

**LD 258: An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other
Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law
Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years
Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025**

Monday, February 13, 2023

Chairs Rotundo, Sachs, Rafferty, and Brennan and distinguished members of the Committees, I am Jason Judd, Executive Director of Educate Maine, a business-led education advocacy organization. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of L.D. 258.

Educate Maine's mission is to champion career readiness by increasing the educational attainment of Maine people. We want all students to succeed in postsecondary education and in the workplace. As a founding member of MaineSpark, a coalition of more than 100 organizations focused on helping to make sure 60% of Maine adults have a degree or credential of value by 2025, we believe education is the foundation for economic development in Maine. Our state's future economic growth depends on a skilled workforce. In 2022, the newest *Making Maine Work* report, a collaboration between the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, Maine Development Foundation, and Educate Maine, was released which summarized a survey of hundreds of business leaders about their top priorities for the administration. Three out of the top six priorities from across Maine related to workforce. Maine employers expressed the need for additional entry level workers, skilled workers, and professional workers.

We are thankful to see that many investments in the proposed biennial budget directly connect to helping Maine reach its state attainment goal and address the workforce challenges by expanding education and training opportunities for learners of all ages in all 16 counties. Our higher education institutions support thousands of students across Maine to get the credentials and degrees they need for high quality employment in our state. The proposed budget includes a 4.5% increase for Maine's public institutions which is essential for each of these institutions to continue to offer high quality education and training programs. We constantly discuss the shortage of workers in fields like healthcare, education, engineering, and the skilled trades. We need to support our higher education institutions so that additional students can enroll, persist, and graduate from these programs and transition into high paying jobs right here in our communities. Maine's investment in Free Community College should also be expanded to the

graduating classes of 2024 and 2025 as proposed. We have seen great success with this pilot program in attracting new students to postsecondary education. These investments in Maine's higher education institutions, along with expanding the maximum award for the Maine State Grant Program, will help thousands of learners pursue postsecondary education and help address our workforce challenges.

We know for students to be successful in higher education and in the workforce, they must have a strong foundation throughout their educational experiences. They must have high quality early learning experiences like those offered in Pre-K programs. We applaud the inclusion of Pre-K expansion within the proposed budget. Early childhood is when students learn both cognitive and character skills which are foundational for success in school and beyond. High quality Pre-K programs have shown to shrink socioeconomic achievement gaps and ensure students are ready to learn when they enter our K-12 schools.

As students continue through Maine's education pipeline, it is essential they have the supports needed to thrive in their classrooms. One of those essential supports is access to free school meals. One in six Maine children face hunger. Fully funding universal meals at schools is one of the best investments Maine can make so that students can learn. In addition to supporting students' basic needs, our schools need to be able to hire and retain great educators who can connect with students and make sure their students have the skills necessary to thrive. Providing funding for the State's obligation to pay 55% of local education costs is essential. These are just a few of the proposed investments which will support our education system, help grow local talent, and strengthen our economy.

Thank you for your time today. I am happy to answer any questions.