

Maine Education Association

Grace Leavitt President | Jesse Hargrove Vice President | Beth French Treasurer
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

Testimony

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.

John Kosinski, Government Relations Director, Maine Education Association

Before the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

February 13, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs and other esteemed members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee,

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

My name is John Kosinski (he/him) and I am proud to serve as the Director of Government Relations for the Maine Education Association (MEA). The MEA represents 24,000 educators in the state of Maine, including teachers and other professionals in nearly every public school in the state and faculty and other professional staff in the University of Maine and Community College Systems.

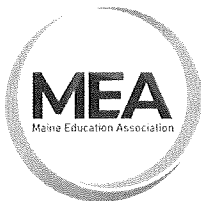
I am here to testify on behalf of the MEA in support of the public higher education proposals contained in LD 258: *An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025.*

We applaud the Governor's proposal to increase funding for public higher education by 4.5%. This significant investment in higher education is needed, now more than ever. Businesses need trained, capable workers. Our state needs an informed and educated populace. Investments such as those proposed by Governor Mills recognize the key roles the University of Maine System and the Community College System play in achieving these goals. We also appreciate the Governor's proposal, as it recognizes the long tail impacts of the tuition freezes in the University of Maine System contained in the last state budget.

It must be noted, while the Governor's proposal represents a significant increase in funding for public higher education, inflation over the past two years has far outpaced state support. Even with this

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increase, we can still expect our public higher education systems to struggle with tight budgets and tough choices.

The MEA supports the Free Community College Program and we appreciate the Governor's proposal to continue this program into the next biennial. This program has led to sharp increases in enrollment at our state's community colleges – all tuition free to many Maine students. Our community colleges provide remarkable education to students and help prepare graduates for careers and further study. While we wholeheartedly support this proposal, we must caution that the Free Community College Program has downstream impacts that must be considered. Specifically, we are concerned the enrollment increases at the community colleges have come at a cost to enrollments at the University of Maine campuses.

According to the University of Maine System Fall 2022 enrollment report, every campus in the UMaine System has seen a decline in student enrollment since the Fall 2018, with the most precipitous declines occurring this Fall, with the one notable exception of the University of Maine at Presque Isle.

Headcount by Campus and Student Level

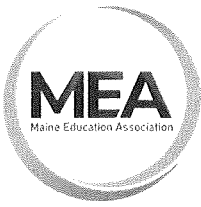
Undergraduate Headcount by Campus (Excludes Early College)

| Campus | Fall 2018 | Fall 2019 | Fall 2020 | Fall 2021 | Fall 2022 | % of Total | 1-year Change | 5-year Change |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| UM | 9,125 | 9,110 | 9,050 | 9,051 | 8,536 | 42.7% | -5.7% | -6.5% |
| UMA | 3,599 | 3,603 | 3,370 | 3,318 | 3,204 | 16.0% | -3.4% | -11.0% |
| UMF | 1,661 | 1,578 | 1,524 | 1,413 | 1,257 | 6.3% | -11.0% | -24.3% |
| UMFK | 1,102 | 958 | 950 | 867 | 709 | 3.5% | -18.2% | -35.7% |
| UMM | 582 | 537 | 498 | 505 | 477 | 2.4% | -5.5% | -18.0% |
| UMPI | 928 | 903 | 1,022 | 1,097 | 1,240 | 6.2% | 13.0% | 33.6% |
| USM | 5,672 | 5,577 | 5,322 | 4,915 | 4,581 | 22.9% | -6.8% | -19.2% |
| Total | 22,669 | 22,266 | 21,736 | 21,166 | 20,004 | 100.0% | -5.5% | -11.8% |

Source: University of Maine System, 2022 Fall Enrollment Report

One MEA member who works in marketing at one of the Universities of Maine told me bluntly: "We can't compete with free." Certainly, some families are choosing the community colleges because the program is now tuition free, and without this incentive those families and students may have chosen to attend a four-year public institution in Maine. We hope the state would want to offer comparable options to students who want to attend a four-year college as they currently offer for those opting for a two-year public institution.

That is why we are eager to work with Senator Tipping on his bill, LD 512, *An Act to Promote Student Enrollment and Degree Completion in the University of Maine System by Providing Tuition Waivers to Eligible Students*. The program is modeled on the Free Community College Program and is intended to offer a comparable program for students/families interested in a four-year program in the University of



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Maine System. Instead of the two years tuition free, this bill seeks to provide the 50% tuition waiver over four years while attending any of the Universities in the University of Maine System. This proposal will give students and families comparable options to consider and allow them to make choices that may best suit their interests, needs and career and life goals.

I want to be clear – the MEA wholeheartedly supports the Free Community College Program and we would like that to continue. This program is certainly opening the doors of higher education to more Maine people. Our hope is the state continue this program and offer a similar one for students interested in the four-year University education.

Thank you for your time and your service and I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.

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