



**Testimony from the University of Maine System
Presented by UMS Director of Government & Community Relations Samantha Warren
In Support of LD 1028, *An Act to Expand the Higher Education Tuition Waiver for Persons
Who Have Resided in Foster Care*, March 22, 2023**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs: My name is Samantha Warren and I am the Director of Government Relations for the University of Maine System.

Our System is committed to ensuring all Maine people can access proven pathways to social and economic mobility through affordable high-quality UMS education. This includes individuals who are, or were at one time, in foster care.

LD 1028 would increase from 30 to 50 the number of new waivers granted each year that allow current or former foster care youth to attend Maine's public universities, community colleges and maritime academy without having to pay for tuition. Currently, the cost of the existing waivers must be absorbed in their entirety by our public postsecondary institutions. UMS, which proudly enrolls the vast majority of waiver recipients, waived \$360,681 just in FY22.

Notably, **the 20 additional waivers proposed by this bill would be subsidized by State appropriation.** For this reason, **UMS strongly supports LD 1028** and commends Rep. Brennan's for his continued leadership championing higher education opportunities for foster youth more than two decades after his legislation first established this important benefit for those who are, or have been, in State care. We also want to acknowledge our partners at FAME, who currently receive no appropriation to administer this complex program and should.

LD 1028 advances a key recommendation of an inclusive stakeholder group convened by UMS in 2019-20 that studied ways to strengthen Maine's foster tuition waiver program. It also brings Maine more in-line with other New England states, including New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Connecticut, where postsecondary tuition and fees for eligible students are funded by the State and not public higher education institutions, in some cases with no limits on the number of beneficiaries and also inclusive of room and board.

I have provided an electronic copy of that stakeholder group's report to your analyst and wanted to highlight some of our findings that were first shared with this Committee in 2020:

- **Maine's tuition waiver program is critical to raising college aspirations and attainment among a population of high-need students who would otherwise be less likely to consider and pursue postsecondary education.**
- Demand far exceeds the current availability of tuition waivers.
- **Expanding the number of tuition waivers without supplemental State funding would be burdensome to Maine's public postsecondary institutions,** which already write-off approximately \$450,000 annually to support current recipients.
- Beyond needed State investment to expand the waiver program to increase college attainment, workforce readiness and self-sufficiency for these underserved students, investments in targeted services and supports are also needed to foster improved outcomes.

We urge you to support this important bill and thank you for your ongoing commitment to the University of Maine System and the students we serve.