



DATE: April 6, 2023
TO: Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
FROM: Samantha Warren, UMS Director of Government & Community Relations
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RE: **Support for LD 1064, An Act to Increase the Minimum Teacher Salary**

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 (UMS), which supports LD 1064, *An Act to Increase the Minimum Teacher Salary*.

Our System is proud to be the state's largest producer of classroom-ready teachers, having awarded nearly 4,000 education degrees or certificates just in the past five years.

Among our six State-approved educator preparation programs (EPPs) are Maine's only to have earned national accreditation (University of Maine, University of Maine at Farmington and University of Southern Maine) and **24 of the past 30 Maine Teachers of the Year have been UMS graduates**, including the 2012 MTOY, Alana Margeson, who now directs teacher education at the University of Maine at Presque Isle.

Overall enrollment in UMS education-related degree and certificate programs has increased by 27% over the last five years, with 4,016 students enrolled in 2021-22. However, much of that growth has been in education-related master's degree programs, for which UMS has experienced significant enrollment gains from 1,094 students in 2017-18 to 1,580 in 2021-22. This 44.4% increase is driven in part because of our new degree programs to meet state workforce needs like UMaine's four new Graduate Certificates in Special Education. While undergraduate education-related enrollment is up slightly over the past five years — aided by new degree programs like UMF's World Languages Education major, launched in 2018, and the University of Maine at Augusta's Elementary and Secondary Education degrees, launched in 2021 — enrollment in programs that lead to teacher certification is down 5.6%, from 1,902 students in fall 2018 to 1,795 students in fall 2022.

It is with this tradition of excellence and experience in preparing thousands of talented Maine teachers and informed by the findings of our own independent Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) that **UMS supports State investment to increase teacher pay, including for Maine's early childhood and public PK-12 educators.**

Leaders of our EPPs note that nationally, public school teachers are more likely than other workers to experience higher levels of anxiety, stress and burnout, and 44% quit the profession within their first five years. This mirrors the Maine findings of a [2021 MEPRI report about educator recruitment and retention](#), which we urge this Committee to revisit and which found that more than half of experienced teachers had "seriously considered leaving the professional in the prior year." [Past MEPRI reports](#) also provide evidence about the connection between

teacher turnover and lower student achievement — especially in high poverty schools — and the cost to districts and taxpayers to fill these vacancies.

The need for higher compensation is continually cited by educators as a barrier to recruitment and retention to the profession, with evidence of higher retention among teachers with higher pay. According to MEPRI, Maine's teacher salaries in 2018 — before legislation was passed to increase the minimum teacher salary — were the lowest in New England. After adjusting for inflation, **Maine teacher salaries in 1999 were actually higher than in 2018.**

UMS universities are working together and with the field to expand access to affordable, appropriately flexible, comprehensive pathways in and through our high-quality preparation programs and the educator workforce. This includes a high-impact “grow your own” teacher residency led by USM and funded through a federal earmark secured by the System thanks to Sens. Collins and King. You will hear later this session from Sen. Pierce how you can help make this successful pilot permanent.

As we have shared with the Committee before, **UMS has been a national leader in college affordability and the debt load of our graduates who have debt is well below the New England average. Yet even relatively small amounts of student debt can be difficult to discharge for those in professions that are essential to our economy and communities but that provide low wages, like early childhood education, teaching and social work.**

Our System's EPPs are confident they could **recruit more qualified candidates into their programs, and in-turn the teaching profession, if teacher salaries were commensurate with expected education and experience.** Feedback from our own students support this. This fall, MEPRI conducted an online survey of UMS undergraduates to explore how students chose their college majors and their perceptions about K-12 teaching as a career. MEPRI's findings, informed by the responses of more than 600 students, will be reported to the Committee this month and include:

- 81% of respondents said pay was a drawback to choosing teaching as a career (no other drawback was selected by more than 40% of respondents).
- 88% of respondents agreed that a starting salary for teachers of \$40,000 was too low and 54% said it “far too little.”

As one UMS EPP leader noted to me when discussing our support for LD 1064, *“In an age where emergency certification reinforces the age-old adage that ‘anyone can teach,’ it is important that we continue to emphasize that teaching is a profession that requires specialized knowledge and expertise. **Ensuring that teachers receive appropriate pay for the service they provide to students, families and communities is one reflection of this.**”*

Thank you for your support of Maine's public institutions and our students, and your commitment to strengthen and grow the state's teacher workforce. Please let me know if I can provide additional information on behalf of UMS in advance of your work session.