

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and honorable members of the State and Local Government Committee. I am Gus La Casse and I am a fourth-year Political Science major at the University of Maine-Orono. I am also a policy intern for Rep. Osher and Sen. Grohoski. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to express my support **LD 1016: An Act to Support College Student Participation as Policy Interns for State Legislators.**

Last summer, I had the opportunity to work for our Department of Education through the Margaret Chase Smith State Government Summer Internship and learn more about the inner workings of State government and bureaucracy. This made me receptive to the prospect of working in State government, leading me to apply when I saw an opportunity to be a policy intern. I didn't immediately think this would be possible for me since I would not be paying to receive academic credit for this opportunity.

To be clear, I am not getting paid to do this work, nor am I getting academic credit. I am doing this because I don't have the money to pay for the academic credit, but I still acknowledge that this is an exceptional opportunity. Having previously attended a public university that did not afford Political Science majors the chance to work in government, I am fortunate to learn about policy by engaging in its processes here.

Working with Rep. Osher and Sen. Grohoski, I have assisted in researching policy, drafting testimony, engaging with stakeholders, and helping create policy that is in the public record today. Seeing state government in action has given me a new appreciation for the amount of work that elected officials and their aides have to do, how much is expected of them, and how much there is still to do. Legislators and aides have a full plate to actively participate in their committees, present their bills, and engage with their constituents. This doesn't even include research and writing drafts of testimony on bills that legislators cosponsor.

By helping Rep. Osher and Sen. Grohoski with this work, I can take pride in the fact that the work I am doing does a little bit to help the cogs of the government machine along. As a Political Science student, this is an invaluable experience; one that both students and policymakers could benefit from. The elective program proposed by **LD 1016: An Act to Support College Student Participation as Policy Interns for State Legislators** would help legislators and aides by lightening the load, and giving policy students an opportunity to learn about government firsthand.

In closing, this is not only a program that would incentivize students and help elected officials, but will also empower youth to partake, breaking down the fourth wall between government and constituent. If not for this experience, I would not have reached out to Rep. Milliken, my representative, asking to create **LD 959: An Act to Prohibit Food Waste by Grocery Stores** with her. Although it failed, this bill demonstrates the power that positive experiences can give in the creation of policy, and the empowerment of future policymakers. As a young Mainer, I ask you to secure Maine university students the opportunity to participate in a rich experience like this without obstacles, and see this program as an investment in Maine's strong democracy.