



Testimony from the University of Maine System
Presented by UMS Director of Government & Community Relations Samantha Warren
Regarding LD 1016, *An Act to Support College Student Participation*
as *Policy Interns for State Legislators*, April 11, 2023

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on State & Local Government: My name is Samantha Warren and I am the Director of Government Relations for the University of Maine System (UMS), providing informational testimony today regarding LD 1016, *An Act to Support College Student Participation as Policy Interns for State Legislators*.

Maine's public universities have a long tradition of preparing and placing students in high-impact internships that provide real-world learning, and career and community connections that increase learner success and the likelihood they will stay to live and work in the state after graduation.

Most relevant to your consideration of LD 1016 are three programs led by the University of Maine:

- The **Kenneth Palmer Maine State Legislative Internship Program**, administered by the UMaine Political Science Department, was started in the 1990s by the now-retired Professor Palmer. The program places 2-4 interns each spring semester in legislative leadership offices, typically those that best align with the students' political leanings. Students work two full days in Augusta, earning six credits, and take their classes on campus the other days. UMaine has also run a congressional internship program in Washington, D.C. since 1958.
- The **Maine Government Summer Internship Program**, administered by UMaine's Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center in partnership with the Maine Bureau of Human Resources, places talented college students in full-time, 12-week paid summer internships with local and state government. Since its establishment in 1967, the program has placed more than 1,800 students and many have gone on to pursue public service careers. The 52 interns in 2022, including your constituents, conducted compensation studies for State agencies, developed data dashboards to assist Department decision-making, created informational webinars for navigating MaineCare and much more. The 2022 program report will be forwarded to the Committee staff.
- The **Maine Public Policy Scholars Program**, which is funded by the Maine Community Foundation and administered by UMaine's Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center, supports a student from each UMS university undertake a year-long research project studying a current state public policy issue. Students receive a \$5,000 scholarship and up to \$1,000 for research expenses including travel.

UMS supports the intent of LD 1016, which is consistent with our commitment to both provide meaningful paid work learning experiences to our students and to serve as a resource to the Legislature and its policy-making. This is an exciting idea, and we appreciate Representative Osher bringing it forward. The volume and quality of applications for our relevant current programs suggests there would be strong student demand for opportunities like those proposed by the bill.

However, based on our extensive experience administering government internships, we believe there must be ample time and thought given to developing a program that best positions participating students, legislators and the institutions for success, especially given the scale of what is being proposed (up to 185 interns). We also think rather than creating something entirely new, there is real opportunity to leverage existing programs like the UMaine offerings I've overviewed, and to think about legislative committees and nonpartisan offices as alternative or additional internship host sites.

UMS would recommend that this bill be amended into a resolve creating a commission to study the further development of a State House internship program, carefully considering things like internship duties, duration and work location; the placement process; training of interns and legislators; curriculum and cohort development; student safety; supervisory structure; space and equipment needs; program evaluation and reporting; and the funding that would be necessary to support intern compensation, program administration and other costs.

We would recommend the group report back to this Committee with recommendations before the Second Regular Session and be inclusive of legislators, leadership office staff, nonpartisan legislative staff including the Legislature's Executive Director and Human Resources Director, students or alumni with relevant internship experience, and university internship coordinators and law, political science and/or public policy faculty.

We would welcome participating in this process and thank the Committee for your support of Maine's public universities and our students.