

Testimony from the University of Maine

**Presented by Penny Bishop, Dean of the College of Education and Human Development,
In Support of LD 1608, *An Act to Address Teacher Shortages Through Financial Assistance and
Career Advancement Opportunities* - April 20, 2023**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs:

My name is Penny Bishop and I am Dean of the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to be here with you today. On behalf of Maine's R1 flagship and the University of Maine System (UMS), I am speaking in strong support of LD 1608, *An Act to Address Teacher Shortages Through Financial Assistance and Career Advancement Opportunities*.

As this Committee well knows, Maine is experiencing a significant shortage of qualified teachers, as is the rest of our nation. We face particular challenges in Maine, however. Our large percentage of rural, remote, or isolated communities makes it difficult to recruit and retain teachers. Our starting salary is the lowest in the northeast. And the windfall elimination act further discourages many educators from choosing Maine as their home.

All of this matters, because research is clear that the classroom teacher is the primary in-school factor influencing student achievement. Making the Maine Teacher Residency Program permanent, as LD 1608 proposes, therefore links directly to improving student outcomes in Maine schools.

We are fortunate that Senators Collins and King secured Congressionally Directed Spending to scale statewide the Maine Teacher Residency Program. We can already see the tangible effects of the program in boosting the educator pipeline, with more than 100 new teachers having been placed by the end of the 2023-24 school year

While the University of Southern Maine administers this program, I want to emphasize this is a statewide collaboration, that residents are enrolled in high-quality educator preparation programs across the UMS – including UMaine – and even at private institutions like the University of New England, and that these residents are filling positions across the state, including rural districts close to and well north of UMaine.

With that as context, I'd like to identify three ways that I believe making this successful residency program permanent, as LD 1608 proposes, would help strengthen Maine's educator workforce: by increasing affordability, the quality of preparation, and the likelihood of retention in the profession.

Affordability

First, LD 1608 would encourage students to choose teaching as a profession by making the pathway more affordable. MEPRI's recent research highlights the importance of affordability to Maine's undergraduate students, who identified the current salary levels of teachers as a "major detractor" to going into teaching. This residency directly reduces the financial burdens of educator preparation, while simultaneously allowing teacher candidates more time to focus on learning the art and science of teaching, and completing their programs with confidence in their skills.

The importance of affordability was also identified in a recent Maine SEEDS survey conducted in December, 2022. This collaboration between the Maine Department of Education and the University of

Maine System asked approximately 1,500 educational technicians across the state to identify the supports that were most likely to help them pursue teaching certification. Financial support for tuition and fees, a paid internship, and courses that fit into their work schedule were all identified as important and all of these would be addressed by making the Maine Teacher Residency Program permanent.

Strong Preparation

Second, LD 1608 would help ensure that the teachers who do enter the profession are well prepared. A well-supervised and supported student teaching experience is an important component of high-quality teacher preparation. Unfortunately, across Maine's educator preparation programs including those within UMS, we too often lose prospective teachers before they complete their student teaching internships because they cannot afford to take time away from the part-time jobs held by so many of our students, many of whom are first-generation and/or Pell-eligible. Unlike in engineering, medicine, business, or other industries, the required work learning experiences in education, like internships or student teaching, are typically unpaid. Instead of completing their programs, these students choose to what we commonly refer to) as "capstone out." They finish their degree program without the accompanying internship, and enter the educator workforce less prepared, less resilient and less likely to remain in the profession, as well as with lower skills and credentials that impact their own social and economic mobility.

Retention

Third, LD 1608 would help to increase retention of teachers in our schools. While residency programs attract people to the teaching profession by making it more affordable, they retain more new teachers as well, because they provide support, a sense of community, and reduced isolation. National research on teacher residencies has illustrated that people who complete teacher residency programs remain in the same district longer than their counterparts. For example, 85 percent of residency graduates associated with the National Center for Teacher Residencies teach for at least three years in the school district where they were prepared, compared to just 50 percent of teachers in other high-needs schools.

However, it is not only new teachers who are positively affected by the residency program. The mentor teachers in the Maine Teacher Residency Program participate in a research-based program designed by faculty at the University of Maine. These mentors consistently report that the program is helpful to their own professional development and classrooms. The time spent honing their development as mentors benefits the particular resident they are supporting, and also their broader school communities, where they work alongside other novice educators. This also reflects national research illustrating that hosting a resident in a classroom may be positively associated with increased teacher effectiveness and improved student academic outcomes. Developing teacher leaders in this way helps to build a more robust career ladder, which is key to retaining some of our most skilled educators in the state.

In closing, this is a new era of teacher preparation. We must find the critical intersection between getting more teachers into Maine schools and ensuring those teachers are in fact effective at promoting student learning and wellbeing. It is also an exciting time, and we are committed to adapting our models to meet the evolving needs of Maine communities. A large part of the success of this residency model is due to its collaborative nature, working closely both within the University of Maine System and externally with our school district partners.

I encourage you to support LD 1608 and thank you for your continuous support of the University of Maine System and of our high-quality educator preparation programs.