



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE

**Testimony from the University of Southern Maine, Presented by Associate Professor of
Teacher Education and Maine Teacher Residency Director Flynn Ross
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 Flynn Ross and I am an Associate Professor of Teacher Education at the University of Southern Maine (USM), where I also direct the Maine Teacher Residency. On behalf of USM and the University of Maine System (UMS), I am speaking today in the strongest support of LD 1608, *An Act to Address Teacher Shortages Through Financial Assistance and Career Advancement Opportunities*.

All Maine students are entitled to equal educational opportunity, which is dependent on their access to highly qualified teachers. Yet as this Committee well knows, our state's severe teacher shortage is limiting learning for students, especially those who are most vulnerable and underserved, and straining those educators who have remained in the workforce. My research just published in the Maine Policy Review shows a correlation between higher teacher turnover and school districts serving a higher population of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch.

For years, university educator preparation program (EPP) faculty have increasingly been hearing from our students that unpaid practicum, field work, and student teaching has been a barrier to their ability to persist in completing their teacher certification program and securing their teaching credential. Some have dropped out of their certification program and begun working in schools as education technicians or under conditional or emergency certification, while others have left the field entirely.

To help address this, in 2020-21, USM partnered with Biddeford Schools to pilot a "grow your own" teacher residency program through which individuals would be employed (at regular rates of compensation) by the district for the entire academic year as co-teaching residents while remaining in postsecondary educator preparation program and being matched with experienced mentor teachers.

This program was so well-received that the System worked with Sens. Susan Collins and Angus King to secure FY22 Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS), known as an earmark, to scale-up System- and state-wide.

This school year, the CDS-supported Maine Teacher Residency has placed 37 educators in 21 rural and urban schools from Fort Kent to Fryeburg, Sumner to Scarborough and many in between including Bangor, Kennebunk, Lewiston and Portland. Using the federal funds, we plan to support an additional 78 residents in 2023-24, and have already received requests for placements from 24 additional school districts and 72 current or aspiring educators.

For example, one recent applicant for the Maine Teacher Residency has worked in a Maine school as an ed tech for a decade. He is a multilingual immigrant from Iraq with a masters degree in physics who wants to teach advanced high school math and physics. However, he is supporting a family and is not able to take unpaid time to pursue a traditional teacher certification program. The Maine Teacher Residency provides a pathway for him to pursue his dream and for Maine to gain a highly qualified teacher in a severe shortage area.

The residency program reinvigorates veteran teachers and immediately supports PK-12 students in their classrooms. In the program mid-year evaluation survey, 96% of mentors agreed that, "Our students benefited academically from having the resident in the classroom" and 91% said that mentoring a resident was professionally rewarding. In one year of data with over 600 students from the Biddeford residency model, more students met or exceeded their academic growth expectations on NWEA tests in classrooms with a resident than in those without.

Nationally, there are more than 200 residency programs. Research on those that have been around for over 20 years consistently show that graduates of these models continue to teach longer at much higher rates than other teacher preparation programs and that they serve much more racially and economically diverse candidates. For example, in 2020, 62% of the residents in National Center for Teacher Residencies identified as people of color compared to 22% of teachers nationally.

The Maine model is adapted based on best practices from those in over 25 other states with support from an advisory group of diverse representatives including from the Maine Education Association, the Maine Department of Education, all EPPs within UMS and Rep. Rebecca Millett. It includes cohort support and stipends for mentor teachers, technical assistance to districts for crafting job positions that recruit new teachers and reinvigorate veteran teachers as mentors, coordination of teacher education courses across our System to ensure accessibility for teaching candidates working full-time in Maine schools, and program assessment.

LD 1608 would provide UMS ongoing funding to continue this proven residency program once the one-time federal award has run-out. Specifically, State appropriations would underwrite training (leading to microcredential) and stipends for mentors (currently \$3,000 per mentor), tuition support for residents with UMS or at private Maine colleges (currently \$3,500 per participant) and all university coordination of the program (currently 1.5 FTE). We anticipate that with \$1 million annually, we could support at least 100 residents and their mentor teachers each year in Maine classrooms that desperately need them serving Maine students who deserve great teachers.

As the Maine DOE's own #TeachMaine plan notes, "The single most important factor in quality education is quality teachers...Teacher residency models are high-impact, high-cost models to address immediate critical shortages, and should be utilized in Maine."

We urge your support of LD 1608 and are grateful for your ongoing support of the University of Maine System and our high-quality educator preparation programs. Thank you and I welcome your questions.