

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and other members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and other esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee.

My name is Lydia Savage and I am a professor of geography in the Muskie School of Public Service at the University of Southern Maine. I am speaking here today as President of the statewide union, Associated Faculties of the Universities of Maine, that represents 1000 fulltime faculty members across our 7 campuses of the University of Maine System.

I am here today to testify neither for nor against the Governor's proposed budget but rather to ask for expanded support for one of the UMS biggest success stories – Maine's early college program also called concurrent or dual enrollment and aspirations. This allows students to take courses through the state's public universities and community colleges while they are in high school – for credit and for free. This program is available to all students – including those homeschooled – has made Maine a national leader in equitable early college access

In 2023-24, a record 5,577 secondary students earned credit through the University of Maine System (UMS), taking courses taught by our faculty on our campuses or online, or by teachers at their home high schools supported by our faculty. In the last decade, our early college enrollment has exploded nearly three-fold.

Using appropriation provided by Gov. Janet Mills and the Legislature, the Maine Department of Education originally paid our public universities about half their tuition cost and we waived the remaining amount. But that appropriations amount has remained flat at \$5.5 million. As a result, the Universities in the Maine System are being challenged financially as we are reimbursed about \$60 per concurrent credit hour when previously it was \$145. UMS is now waving 75% of the credit hour costs for these courses even as every campus faces financial challenges.

Early college is an incredibly successful program and faculty are committed to student access and success. For example, graduation rates for students of color who enrolled in UMS early college and then our public universities were 33 percentage points higher than for their peers who did not, and 12 percentage points higher for rural participants. This is a demonstrable success story that could provide even more opportunity and universal access with an increased investment for adequate funding.

This is an investment with a proven return.

Thank you.

Lydia Savage  
Portland, Maine