

Testimony of Allie Smith, Maine Law Student, in Support of Funding for the University of Maine System as Proposed in Governor Mills' FY 26–27 Budget Proposal, LD 210, Pages A-636

Senators Rotundo and Rafferty, Representatives Gattine and Murphy, and the distinguished members of the Appropriations and Education Committees: thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of the proposed investments in the University of Maine System set forth in Governor Mills' state budget.

My name is Allie Smith and I am in my third and final year at Maine Law. I grew up in Yarmouth and have lived in downtown Lewiston for the last seven years. As a young person, I couldn't wait to get out of my small town and see the world. I was lucky enough to actually be able to do so – and after about ten years, I finally started to realize what a special place Maine is.

So, in 2016, I moved home to Maine to help my mother start a nonprofit focused on housing, and to work with young people experiencing homelessness. After six years working with youth, including those exiting Maine's youth prison, I finally decided to do something that I had been considering my entire life: go to law school.

I was thirty-three years old, with a mortgage and a savings account proportional to a career spent in the nonprofit sector. Luckily for me, there was Maine Law.

Maine Law is the only law school I applied to. That's not just because it's incredibly affordable, or because it offers generous financial aid – although both of those things are certainly true.

I chose Maine Law, and Maine Law alone, because it is the heartbeat of the legal community and profession in Maine. Maine Law is raising the next generation of Maine lawyers. My classmates are thoughtful, kind, brilliant people who are by and large committed to making their mark here, in Maine.

I cannot emphasize enough how lucky Maine is to have an affordable, accessible, excellent, and public law school. Maine Law graduates often go on to careers in public or nonprofit service, where they protect Mainers' constitutional rights and ensure they have access to justice – careers they can pursue precisely because their legal education was so affordable.

At Maine Law, I learn from incredibly talented professors who care, deeply, for their students and the future of Maine. Right now, I am learning administrative law from a professor who used to run a federal administrative agency. Last semester, I learned about federal courts and civil rights litigation from a professor who was one of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s attorneys.

I've been able to not only learn the law, but apply it to the things I am most passionate about. Through Maine Law's Clinics, I've been directly representing young people in court for over a year. I became the Editor-in-Chief of the Maine Law Review, and this Spring we and Maine

Law's other two student journals are putting on a Symposium focused on housing policy and the rights of the unhoused. Next year, I will be clerking in a federal appellate court.

None of this would have been possible for me without the affordable, rigorous, and supportive education I've received at Maine Law.

I truly believe there is no better way to become a Maine lawyer than by studying at Maine Law – and there is no better way to create excellent Maine lawyers and promote Mainers' access to justice than by continuing to invest in Maine Law, and the University of Maine System as a whole.

Thank you all for your support for the University of Maine System. I sincerely hope that support will continue. I am happy to answer any questions you have. Thank you for your time.