



University of Maine System Testimony Regarding LD 642, An Act to Provide Students in the University of Maine System Who Are Parents or Pregnant Individuals Priority Registration for Courses — Presented by UMS Chief External & Governmental Affairs Officer Samantha Warren — March 17, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs: My name is Sam Warren and I am the Chief External & Governmental Affairs Officer for the University of Maine System (UMS).

Maine's public universities are committed to meeting the needs of all students, including those who are pregnant and parenting. This fall, we achieved our **highest-ever retention rate**, reinforcing that our relentless focus on the success of our students is paying off.

In addition to our region-leading affordability, **our System ensures accessibility to all students, including working adults who may also have family responsibilities, through the expansion of online educational offerings.** We now offer more than 200 programs that can be completed fully online, with a goal in our new strategic plan to double that by 2028. Asynchronous offerings, like the University of Maine at Presque Isle's YourPace, allow busy working adults to access their courses at any time and advance as they master the material, with multiple session start dates throughout the year. 40% of our System's credit hours are now delivered at a distance.

Across our System, course registration processes vary. At smaller UMS universities, registration typically opens simultaneously for all currently enrolled degree-seeking students, and incoming students may register for their courses after conferring with their academic advisor. At our larger universities, including the University of Maine and the University of Southern Maine (USM), **the timing of course registration is dependent on the number of credits earned, ensuring those closest to their degree and the Maine workforce stay on track to timely completion.** UMaine and USM also offer priority registration to Veterans and those actively serving, consistent with a commitment to supporting military-affiliated students.

Students who may be pregnant or parenting are afforded rights under federal Title IX, and when practicable, UMS may also extend those same rights to a student whose partner is pregnant. It should be noted that pregnant and parenting students are not required to disclose their status to anyone other than the Title IX Coordinator to receive accommodations and that their information is kept confidential unless the student consents to it being disclosed.

For pregnant students, these rights include, but are not limited to, classroom and academic accommodations like flexible attendance, larger desks, extensions for assignments and

course add/drop, the ability to take breaks during exams, and reassignment of classrooms so they are accessible to those who cannot take the stairs. Our public universities' student support services may additionally help pregnant students switch sections of a course to accommodate morning sickness or secure a list of chemicals that may be used in a lab course in advance of the start of the semester so the pregnant student can review risks with their health care provider.

For parenting students, these rights include support for lactation and chestfeeding, including in the classroom, provided it is not disruptive. We also provide parents with contact information for childcare in the community and assist with classroom accommodations, including excused absences for appointments and identifying courses that align with their child(ren)'s care and/or school schedules.

In summary, **our universities work with pregnant and parenting students to find solutions that will meet their unique needs and those of their child(ren) and enable them to continue their postsecondary education and upward mobility** because the law requires it and because it aligns with our public mission and commitment to student success.

With more than 30,000 students enrolled this academic year, the population we serve is diverse, with learners of all ages and in all stages of their personal and professional lives balancing demands from parenting and caregiving for ill/aging parents and partners to military service to maintaining multiple jobs. 40% of our current students are age 25 and older. We are concerned that legislatively mandating preference for one large group of learners would undermine student privacy rights and unintentionally lead to the discrimination of other groups of students who may also have legitimate needs to access preferred university courses.

Thank you for your ongoing support of the University of Maine System and I welcome your questions.