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Testimony of Representative Laurie Osher presenting
**LD 624, Resolve, to Create the Commission to Study a Legislative
Internship Program**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury and honorable members of the State and Local Government Committee. I am Laurie Osher, and I represent District 25, the majority of Orono.

Thank you for the opportunity to introduce LD 624, Resolve, to Create the Commission to Study a Legislative Internship Program. A legislative internship program will provide the opportunity for Maine college students to learn from legislators and the staff of the legislative branch of Maine government and assist those legislators as they complete their work.

I bring you this resolve as both a legislator and as an educator.

I moved to Maine in 1999 to become a 60% research/40% teaching faculty member at the University of Maine. In that role, I completed soil science and estuary ecosystem research and taught classes to upper-level undergraduate students and graduate students. During the 9 years I worked at the University, I mentored many students. Most of the undergraduate students that I interacted with were enrolled in my classes or members of the student groups for which I served as the faculty advisor. Each year, a few dozen students were my academic advisees. This means that together we discussed their future goals, and I assisted them to choose courses. I always encouraged my students to find opportunities for hands-on learning. Each year, a few undergraduates worked as field or laboratory research assistants with me and my graduate students. Each year, at least one undergraduate student worked with me to design and complete their own independent research. One of those students published her findings in a peer-reviewed journal.

Working one-on-one with these bright students were some of the best experiences of my career as a faculty member. While my role was as their teacher, I learned so much from them and the work we completed together was better because of the fresh perspective and enthusiasm they brought to each task. While lectures, laboratory and field classes are the standard ways that science students at the Universities learned, those that completed independent projects and worked directly with me or another mentor were the most prepared to begin working in an actual workplace once they graduated.

When I served in my first term as a legislator, I was impressed by the amount of things known, juggled and achieved by the legislative staffers. They write testimony drafts, assist with constituent services, and assist us with communicating by email and social media. As a group, they are impressive. They have so many skills and so much institutional knowledge, and the longer they work in the State House, the more knowledge and skills they accumulate. As I got to know some of the staff, I learned that some who work in the State House and the executive branch knew they wanted a career in government service because they had participated in the Maine Government Summer Internship Program.

The Maine Government Summer Interns are paid for twelve weeks and work in the Office of the Governor or the Maine Bureau of Human Resources or other government agencies. State and municipal employees serve as the intern's supervisors. The interns gain valuable professional experience and build professional networks while assisting their mentors and supervisors to complete their important work.

I wondered why such a great program was only available to students in the summer. It seemed to me that Maine students should also have the opportunity to intern during the legislative session, in preparation for a future as either a staffer or a legislator. Legislators should also have the opportunity to work with enthusiastic and motivated students interested in government service.

In the 131st Legislature, I sponsored LD 1016, An Act to Support College Student Participation as Policy Interns. That bill proposed that interns would work up to 10 hours a week with legislators and be paid for that work. To be eligible, a student would need to either be attending an accredited institution of higher education in Maine or be a Maine resident attending an accredited out of state institution. It proposed that the University of Maine System, in coordination with the Legislative Council, designate or establish a coordinator within the system to oversee the placement of policy interns with Legislators under the internship program.

It was heard by this committee and was voted ought to pass as amended (OTPA). The amendment replaced the bill with a resolve to create a commission to study a legislative internship program. There was a fiscal note, and the bill went to the table but was not funded prior to the session ending sine die.

I'm reintroducing the resolve this session as LD 624. This resolve creates the Commission to Study a Legislative Internship Program. The proposed commission will have 12 members. One Senator and one Representative, who are both members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, will serve as co-chairs of the commission. The commission will study and develop a structure for an internship program.

The program will be open to Maine postsecondary education institution students. Those students will be matched with members of the Legislature. Interns will learn about the work of the Legislature and assist members of the Legislature with the policy work of the Legislature. The commission will set out recommendations for an internship program, including a pilot internship program starting in the First Regular Session of the 133rd Legislature. The commission will be required to submit a report to the Legislative Council by February 1, 2026.

I urge you to support this legislation that will help to train and inspire a new generation of leaders who may continue the important work of government in the future. Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.