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Testimony of Representative Michael Brennan presenting

LD 974, Resolve, to Increase the High School Graduation Rate by Creating the Maine Promise Initiative

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Good morning, Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy and fellow distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Michael Brennan, and I represent House District 115, which includes a portion of Portland.

Today, I am here to introduce **LD 974, Resolve, to Increase the High School Graduation Rate by Creating the Maine Promise Initiative**.

This measure would direct the Department of Education (DOE) to create the Maine Promise Initiative,

which would work to achieve a 95% high school graduation rate by 2030 within a 4 or 6-year time period.

Further, this program will include increasing the graduation rates for identified populations that are currently below the 2025 graduation rates of Maine's general population of secondary school students. The DOE will be directed to report out the progress of their efforts to this committee.

According to the Maine Education Policy Research Institute's (MEPRI) March 2025 Report on Analysis of Maine's High School Graduation Rates, Maine's statewide high school graduation rate was 86% in spring 2022 which is consistent with the national average of 87%. While this is good news, we are seeing data that suggests a significant number of certain populations are struggling to graduate.

Nationwide, there has been an increase in the percentage of low-income students (70%-81%), English Language Learners (57%-72%) and students with disabilities (59%-71%) graduating from high school from 2011 to 2022. As stated in the report, most of the student subgroups examined have considerably lower graduation rates than the total student population.

Below, I have included an excerpt of the graduation rates for the subgroups they explored, which I believe gets to the core of why LD 974 is needed:

- Since 2012, there has been an almost 50% increase in the number of economically disadvantaged high school students in Maine, and this group made up 46% of the 2022 graduating cohort. **The graduation rate for Maine's economically disadvantaged students was 78% in 2022 compared to a graduation rate of 93% for non-economically disadvantaged students.**
- There has also been a doubling in the number of homeless students from 2012 to 2022. Homeless students made up 3.5% of the 2022 graduation cohort. **The graduation rates for homeless students (59%) and students in foster care (57%) are significantly below the statewide rate for all students (86%).**
- Maine has seen an increase in the number of students in special education since 2012, at the same time when there has been a decline in the number of students overall. The percentage of students in the graduating cohort who receive special education services rose from 15% to 21% by 2020; **this was the highest percentage in the nation. Graduation rates for this subgroup rose from 68% in 2012 to 73% in 2022 and were lower than the statewide graduation rates for those years (84% and 86%).**
- The number of multilingual learners in the graduating cohort almost doubled between 2012 and 2022. In 2022, multilingual learners comprised three percent of the graduating cohort. **The graduation rates for multilingual learners varied from 70% to 81% and are lower than the statewide rates for all students.**
- In Maine, the percentage of White students declined from 94% in 2012 to 87% in 2022. Graduation rates for Native Americans and Alaska Natives declined from 71% in 2012 to 69% in 2017. Graduation rates for Black or African American and Hispanic or Latino students were lower than rates for White students or the statewide rates for all students. Asian students had higher graduation rates than White students or the statewide rates for all students.
- Since 2012, the graduation rates of both males and females have increased by four percentage points. Maine follows the national trend of males having lower high school graduation rates than females. **In 2022, 84% of males graduated compared to 89% of females.**

High school graduation rates have been correlated with better job prospects and higher earning potential, in addition to building a foundation for further education. LD 974 would help to ensure that Maine students are reaching their full potential and achieving the great accomplishment of graduating high school.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.