

April 10, 2025

Senator Joseph Rafferty
Representative Kelly Murphy
Joint Standing Committee on Education
and Cultural Affairs

**RE: Maine Independent Colleges Association Testimony in Opposition to 1285,
An Act to Prohibit the Consideration of Legacy Preferences or Donor
Preferences in Postsecondary Educational Institution Admissions**

Dear Senator Rafferty and Representative Murphy:

I represent the Maine Independent Colleges Association (MICA) and testify today against LD 1285.

MICA represents 11 independent, nonprofit colleges and universities¹ throughout Maine that serve over 32,630 students, over 7,000 of whom are from Maine. These institutions are located in municipalities of all sizes across the State, from Maine's largest city to small tourist towns and farming communities. While they share the attributes of being independent and nonprofit, these institutions are highly diverse and serve very different aspects of the needs of Maine people. Collectively, the 11 institutions are an economic engine and an integral part of Maine's Higher Educational eco-system, as well as an important part of the Maine economy. Together they:

- Directly employ over 7,180 Maine workers.
- Support 14,300 jobs for Maine workers (both direct and indirect) with earnings in excess of \$632 million.
- Operating expenditures of over \$979 million.
- Capital expenditures of over \$200 million
- Have an estimated economic impact on Maine's economy of over \$2 billion each year.
- Generated \$51,839,000 in total taxes for state and local governments.
- Contribute over \$24 million in local community service.
- Provide over \$72 million in financial aid to Maine students.
- Provide access to facilities in all of their communities
- Draw nearly 300,000 visitors to our state each year

¹ Bates College, Bowdoin College, Colby College, College of the Atlantic, Husson University, Maine College of Art, Roux Institute at Northeastern University, St. Joseph's College of Maine, Thomas College, Unity College, and University of New England.

April 10, 2025

Page 2

LD 1285 seeks to ban legacy and donor preference in college admissions. In June of 2023, the Supreme Court in Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard effectively banned affirmative action for admissions at higher education institutions that receive federal funding. This has reignited the age-old debate around the fairness of legacy admissions.

Higher Education Admissions and the Role of Legacy and Donor Preferences

MICA is categorically against any legislative attempts to mandate changes to admissions policies, including those in LD 1285 targeting legacy and donor preferences. Admissions policies are as diverse and unique as each of Maine's independent colleges. MICA advocates for institutional autonomy in admissions decisions.

While most of our schools do not utilize legacy and donor preferences, some schools use these preferences to not only maintain traditions, but to foster a sense of community and continuity with the institution. These legacy students help build a student body consistent with the institutions's history, mission, values, and culture, which enhances the overall campus experience for all the students. These policies help bond alumni to current and prospective students and institution, making a family-like environment.

Philanthropy

Legacy and donor preferences directly impact the financial stability of higher education institutions by encouraging alumni and other benefactors to contribute funds for scholarships, infrastructure, research, etc. And this philanthropy helps the institutions maintain a diverse socio-economic range of students on campus.

Maintaining Autonomy and the Independence of Independent Colleges

We understand that the intent of LD 1285 is to create a more meritocratic policy within college admissions. However, the MICA schools believe it is crucial that they have the autonomy to shape their admissions policies in ways that align their diverse missions and values, whether through admissions preferences or otherwise. Many schools have chosen to move away from legacy and donor preferences, but they should be able to do so on their own accord.

We urge the Committee to not overreach into the decision making of our higher education institutions with regard to their admissions policies, including those targeting legacy and donor preferences.

Sincerely,

Daniel W. Walker