



**University of Maine System Testimony in Support
of LD 1558, Resolve, Establishing the Commission to Update Maine's Public Policy
on Higher Education — Presented by UMS Chief External & Governmental Affairs
Officer Samantha Warren — April 24, 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), which supports LD 1558, *Resolve, Establishing the Commission to Update Maine's Public Policy on Higher Education*.

Maine's public universities recognize that State statute governing higher education is often outdated and does not always reflect today's postsecondary students; the new modalities in which our institutions provide high-quality education and research learning experiences to them; and the dynamic context of higher education, employer and community need, and innovation that leads to new and effective models of higher education. Portions of the section on public policy have not been updated since 1981, eight years before the University of Maine at Augusta (UMA) led the nation in pioneering the use of ITV to allow place-bound learners to access higher education. And the chapter governing New Ventures Maine, a program of our System administered by UMA, still includes language about "displaced homemakers."

Maine is unique in not having a State agency or overarching governing body strategically focused on higher education beyond the review of requests for degree-granting authority and assessment and approval of educator preparation programs (State Board of Education). For example, in New England, New Hampshire has a Higher Education Commission, Massachusetts has a Department of Higher Education, Vermont has a Higher Education Council, Connecticut has an Office of Higher Education, and Rhode Island has an Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner.

As the foremost educational and research enterprise in the state, UMS often takes the lead as convenor and authority on statewide higher education matters and continues to welcome that important responsibility. For example, the State Higher Education Executive Officer (SHEEO) for the state is the UMS Chancellor. Additionally, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Chancellor Malloy convened the leaders of Maine's public and private institutions to develop a reopening framework, drawing on the expertise of the University of Maine's scientists and economists. UMS, along with our partners at the Maine Community College System (MCCS), is also a founding partner of MaineSpark, a coalition working to advance the state's postsecondary degree/credential attainment goal, which is codified in a section of State statute focused on labor and industry (Title 26).

Recent conversations in this Committee about the impact on Maine's higher education marketplace of public investment to advance universal college access and affordability at only some institutions reinforce that the time is right for strategic conversation about public policy on higher education. So too does this Committee's consideration of funding fairness among public institutions that have varying levels of statewide responsibility and impact.

For these reasons, we appreciate Representative Sargent reintroducing the Resolve to create this Commission, which was unanimously endorsed by the Committee in 2023 (LD 1264), yet never convened. Not only does LD 1558 offer a long-overdue opportunity to modernize Maine statute to reflect changes in the higher education landscape and best practice over the past three-plus decades, but UMS hopes that it will also elevate the increasingly important role of affordable higher education to advancing the upward mobility of Maine people and the prosperity of our state.

Regarding the composition of the Commission, UMS suggests that a member from each of the public Boards of Trustees (UMS, MCCS, and Maine Maritime Academy) be included, given their statutory roles in governance, policy, and planning. For UMS Trustees, this includes responsibility to "Plan strategies for programs and allocation of resources that most effectively serve the educational needs of the citizens of this State" and "Develop and maintain a strong system of accountability to the public for performance results of the system" — both of which are highly relevant to the duties of the proposed Commission.

We look forward to participating in this process and thank the Committee for your support of Maine's public institutions and the more than 46,000 students we collectively enroll.