

Testimony to the Maine State Legislature Re: LD 1627 - An Act Regarding Workforce Development, Education Reform and Talent Retention

Submitted By: Craig Larrabee, President & CEO, JMG

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Thank you, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony neither for nor against LD 1627. I submit this written statement to demonstrate how Jobs for Maine's Graduates (JMG) is currently fulfilling some of the objectives of this bill; and, how JMG's proven impact supports the workforce development and talent retention priorities outlined in the Maine Economic Development Strategy: The 2024 Reset. As stated in the "Reset" plan: *JMG is Forging a Future Workforce.*

Founded by the Maine State Legislature in 1993, our mission is to serve students who face barriers to success in education and the workforce. JMG is a statewide nonprofit organization that partners with public education and private businesses to offer results-driven solutions to ensure all Maine students graduate, attain post-secondary credentials, and pursue meaningful careers. JMG serves 12,000 students annually in 150 programs embedded in public middle and high schools, career and technical education centers, and on every campus in the University of Maine System and the Maine Community College System.

1. JMG Supports Career Readiness Through Real-World Learning Opportunities

LD 1627 proposes a mandate that all high school students participate in an internship, apprenticeship, or cooperative education experience. JMG already embeds these experiences within its programming through competency-based education, career exploration, employer engagement, extended learning opportunities (ELOs), and career-aligned micro-credentials. In the past three academic years, JMG has provided these experiences not only to students enrolled in JMG, but also to the broader high school student population to support post-pandemic student recovery strategies. JMG has provided the statewide infrastructure and resources, so that from September 2022 thru March 2025:

- More than 1,800 students have earned high school credit through extended learning opportunities.
- 4,500 students have earned a Maine Career Exploration Badge; including, a \$500 academic award.
- An additional 450 students have earned other career-ready micro-credentials and credentials, including 170 for college credit.
- JMG intentionally aligns these experiences to Maine's high-demand occupational fields, and more than 1,000 employers have dedicated more than 500,000 volunteer hours, directly engaging students – members of the future workforce – through these efforts.

2. JMG Increases High School Graduation Rates and Reduces Dropout Risks

According to a peer-reviewed study published by the American Institutes for Research (AIR), based in Washington D.C., students who participated in JMG had a high school graduation rate of 92%, compared to the statewide rate of 87.4% for all students and 78.9% for economically disadvantaged students (Maine DOE). For economically disadvantaged JMG participants, the graduation rate rose to 96%.

The AIR study coined “the JMG effect” stating that JMG participation increased the likelihood of high school graduation by:

- 8 percentage points for all students
- 15 percentage points for economically disadvantaged students
- 12 percentage points for students with disabilities

Additionally, dropout rates decreased by 8.4 percentage points for students receiving free or reduced lunch and by 5.6 percentage points for students with disabilities (AIR, 2020).

3. JMG Aligns with Maine's Talent Development and Wage Growth Goals

The 2024 Reset Plan emphasizes growing local talent and increasing credential attainment. JMG directly supports these goals:

- JMG students, despite facing barriers (e.g., economically disadvantaged, in foster care, low academic performance, have a disability, from an underserved population) have shown consistent success in the workforce.
- Stepwise Data Research, an economic research firm in Yarmouth, Maine, in partnership with the Maine Department of Labor, found that JMG graduates experienced significant, consistent, and sustained wage increases after high school: for the JMG classes of 2009 and 2010, average annual wages increased over 18%, or \$2,300 dollars per year – more than 10 times the rate of inflation.

4. JMG Strengthens Postsecondary Enrollment and Completion

Postsecondary success is central to Maine’s economic development. JMG's College Success Program (CSP) serves approximately 1,300 students annually, and is now operating on all public postsecondary campuses and Thomas College. These student are first-generation and come from low-income backgrounds; and, JMG’s outcomes exceed state benchmarks:

- 77% first-year college persistence rate (compared to 53% for economically disadvantaged students statewide)
- Of the JMG high school graduates who enrolled in college in the fall semester of 2018, 61% have successfully earned a degree or credential of value within a six-year period. JMG expects the Class of 2019 will achieve the same or higher attainment rate by the conclusion of the 2024-2025 academic year.

5. JMG Bridges Employers and Schools for Talent Development

JMG has built a robust network of employer partners across Maine to provide meaningful work experience, job shadows, internships, and mentoring, especially in rural and underserved areas. This directly supports LD 1627’s call for employer partnerships, earn-while-you-learn models, and workforce-aligned training.

Conclusion: JMG is not only aligned with the priorities of LD 1627 and the Maine Economic Strategy Reset; it is already demonstrating measurable impact. JMG is a proven, cost-effective model for advancing the outcomes envisioned in both Maine’s proposed legislation and economic development strategy. It is scalable, data-driven, and equitably focused. Through its unique public/private partnership approach, JMG can continue to serve as a **cornerstone of Maine’s strategy to build a stronger, more inclusive, and better-prepared workforce**. Thank you for your consideration. I welcome any questions and would be honored to provide further information upon request.



Craig Larrabee (back row, 4th from left) and Kim Acker Lipp (back row, 2nd from right) with key stakeholders, business partners and former JMG students.

JMG: Building Maine's future workforce through partnership and ingenuity

Equipping students with skills and opportunities to prepare them for success in education and beyond

For over 30 years, JMG Inc. (formerly Jobs for Maine's Graduates) has been at the forefront of addressing Maine's growing workforce challenges, offering equitable solutions to economically disadvantaged and underserved students. From a dropout prevention program to a statewide leader, the organization now serves over 12,000 students annually across every county. This growth is a testament to JMG's commitment to providing the right support at the right time to help students succeed from middle school through postsecondary education and into the workforce.

"We've built something very special, and we're really excited about sharing our story," says Craig Larrabee, president and CEO of JMG. "The success of our organization is really built on being student-centered and results-driven, meeting students where they're at and developing models of direct services that help them raise their aspirations and become productive citizens."



President and CEO, JMG Inc.

JMG's journey began as a program engaging high school students who were at risk of not completing their education. Over time, the organization evolved to encompass students in middle school, high school and postsecondary institutions. Its work is no longer limited to helping students graduate but extends to ensuring they are prepared for whatever comes next, whether it is higher education or the workforce. As Maine continues to face significant demographic challenges, including an aging population and a shortage of skilled workers, JMG's mission to provide students with relevant, career-ready skills has never been more critical.

Building Workplace Competency

By combining experiential learning with competency-based education, JMG prepares students for real-world challenges, giving them a competitive edge as they enter the workforce or postsecondary pathways. JMG has over 150 programs, partnering with schools and a network of employers across the state to ensure that students are equipped with both academic knowledge and workplace competencies.

One of JMG's key innovations is developing Maine's first statewide micro-credential framework, allowing students to earn and stack qualifications that demonstrate competencies to employers. As the students earn their micro-credentials, they get a badge that can be published on social media or LinkedIn, which can be seen by colleges and employers. The program has been so successful that JMG created another nonprofit, Generation US (GenUS), to offer the initiative to partners. This past August, Digital Promise Global published a research paper about JMG's micro-credentials and design approach entitled "The Promise of Micro-credentials and Learning and Employment Record Technologies for Youth and K-12 Schools." Later this fall, JMG will be presenting its micro-credential framework at the Aurora Institute Symposium, a national conference for education innovators who are working to transform K-12 education.

"Our micro-credential framework allows high school students to show that they can persist while allowing them to have agency and choice in their learning," says JMG Executive Vice President Kimberley Acker Lipp, who has been with JMG for over 20 years. "Highly personalized to every learner, micro-credentialing gives students an effective currency to colleges or future employers."



Executive Vice President, JMG Inc.

Partnership Driven

In addition to this practical focus, JMG's work is deeply rooted in Maine's spirit of collaboration. Since its inception, the organization has received strong nonpartisan political support. Governors, legislators, school administrators and the business community have all recognized the value of investing in Maine's youth.

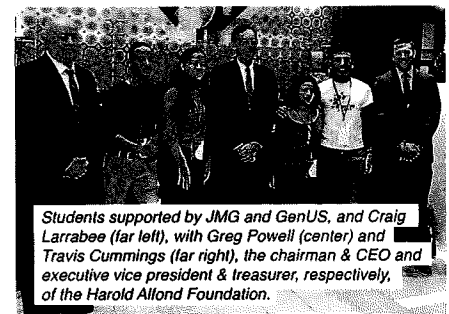
"When you think about Democrats, Republicans and Independents all coming together in a nonpartisan way, that's a story in itself in today's world," says Larrabee, who joined JMG as a classroom specialist when it began in 1993. "To have that happen in our state for over 30 years is something that is difficult to overlook. It's really about the State of Maine and its leaders understanding the importance of children for our future."

JMG's ongoing success is also tied to the support it receives from Maine-based foundations. One of its most significant supporters is the Harold Alfond Foundation, which awarded JMG a \$10-million grant to expand its College Success programs. This funding has allowed JMG to provide targeted support to students across all of Maine's public university and public community college campuses.

Similarly, the MELMAC Education Foundation has been a key partner in supporting JMG's mission to make postsecondary education more accessible to all Maine students. JMG and the MELMAC Education Foundation are working with individual schools in an organic way to create change within districts to make them more student-centered and results-driven.

Scaling Services and Scope

Looking forward, JMG continues to innovate. The organization is exploring partnerships and funding opportunities through GenUS that will allow it to broaden its work beyond Maine. JMG's impact extends beyond individual students. By helping them develop career-ready skills and achieve academic success, the organization is also addressing Maine's broader economic challenges. JMG plays a critical role in preparing the next generation of leaders, workers and entrepreneurs.



Students supported by JMG and GenUS, and Craig Larrabee (far left), with Greg Powell (center) and Travis Cummings (far right), the chairman & CEO and executive vice president & treasurer, respectively, of the Harold Alfond Foundation.

