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Testimony of Rep. Julie McCabe in support of
**LD 1624, An Act to Provide Funding for Summer School
Programming**
Before the Joint Standing Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

Good morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Julie McCabe, and I represent District 93, which is part of Lewiston.

I am pleased to co-sponsor and testify today in support of **LD 1624, An Act to Provide Funding for Summer School Programming** and thank Representative Warren for bringing this bill forward.

The need for summer programs for Maine students cannot be overstated. Though there is research that demonstrates the efficacy of multi-week, academic focused summer programs for increasing low-income student achievement, schools continue to use a century old model of part year instruction.¹ This bill draws attention to the inequitable model of education that our society tolerates — to our own detriment. By not providing summer programs, we are allowing students who are already behind their peers to continue to struggle in the next academic year, perpetuating a cycle of academic decline and frustration for thousands of students.

My testimony will mainly focus on the secondary portion of this bill, but the research is clear that early intervention at the elementary level has proven benefits for addressing academic deficiencies.² When deficits are left unaddressed, the results are nothing short of dire. Because research also tells us that inability to read at grade level proficiency by the end of third grade leaves students four times more likely to drop out compared to their proficient peers. This risk grows to six times more likely to drop out if you struggle to read and you are from a low-income background.³ This bill offers hope for elementary students who desperately need extra support and whose future outcomes depend on our investment.

¹ https://annenberg.brown.edu/sites/default/files/EdResearch_for_Recovery_Design_Principles_2.pdf

² <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6247899/>

³ https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-Early_Warning_Full_Report-2010.pdf

I will focus the remainder of my testimony on the promise this bill offers for reducing the still too high rate of high school dropouts in our state. According to the latest data available from the 2023-2024 school year, the graduation rate for low-income Maine students was 15% less than their non-economically disadvantaged peers.⁴ This amounts to 2 in 10 low-income students not crossing the finish line to earn a high school diploma every year. These kinds of economic disparities prove that the current model is not working. Simply put, our schools are not the great equalizers we dream them to be and in their current state, serve only to reproduce the stagnant class system that our state and country as a whole has become inured to.

We know that outcomes for students who do not earn a high school degree are deeply concerning and they demand our attention this morning. According to data from the National Institute of Health: “National estimates suggest that each high school dropout costs the United States economy at least \$250,000 over the course of his or her lifetime because of greater reliance on welfare and Medicaid, more criminal activity, poorer health, and lower tax contributions. On average, the annual median income of a high school dropout is \$25,000, compared to \$46,000 for an individual with a high school or equivalent degree.”⁵

Therefore, there is not only a moral obligation to provide support services to our most vulnerable students during the summer months, but there is also an economic case to be made and a society benefit writ large.

Much like third grade, freshman year of high school is also considered a make or break year. I remember my first principal Mr. Moccia, a legend in the Oxford Hills area, explaining this to me in no uncertain terms. If students record a high or even moderate number of absences during their freshman year or fail one class, they are at an increased risk of dropping out.⁶ The transition to freshman year is hard for any student. But for students who have to miss school to watch younger siblings so their parents can work, who had to move to stay with family friends in another town because they lost their home or who may be dealing with chronic, untreated health issues because of a lack of care providers, we should do everything we possibly can to help these students on the economic margins to catch up.

The school where I teach, Next Step, is focused on doing school differently and this includes providing summer school programming in tandem with our founding partner, the Tree Street Youth organization. In keeping with best practices, the programs offered are multi-week and engaging, both of which are necessary to ensure long lasting academic gains and high attendance rates, which is especially important in this high absenteeism post-pandemic period. Through high interest credit recovery classes, we can help students catch up to where they deserve, desire and are highly capable of being — thriving and graduating from high school.

⁴ <https://www.maine.gov/doe/data-warehouse/reporting/graduation>

⁵ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4877222/#:~:text=National%20estimates%20suggest%20that%20each,d isparities%20%5B%2C%5D>

⁶ <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/what-matters-staying-track-and-graduating-chicago-public-schools-focus-students>

As my former student, now friend and colleague, Ny'Shia Dunn reflects, "The impact Next Step and Tree Street had on me was they made me feel like I was able to achieve anything I put my mind to. They had different ways to teach me other than worksheets. For example, hands-on activities, field trips and visuals."

Every student in our state deserves high quality academic and enrichment summer programming if they are at risk of falling through the cracks. Our state cannot afford to look the other way. I urge this committee to vote ought to pass on LD 1624 to help our most vulnerable students reach their true potential.