



Joseph Baldacci
Senator, District 9

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony of Sen. Joe Baldacci presenting

LD 1833, "An Act to Expand Law Education and Training by Creating a Night Law School Program,"

To the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

May 5, 2025

Good morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Joe Baldacci, and I represent Senate District 9, which includes Bangor and Hermon. I am here today to present LD 1833, "**An Act to Expand Law Education and Training by Creating a Night Law School Program.**"

Rural Maine, especially northern, eastern and western Maine are currently experiencing a shortage of lawyers. The problem is worsened by what is essentially a crisis of demographics.

1. We are the oldest state in the country.
2. According to reports, even before COVID, almost half of Maine's attorneys are near the age of 60 while just 27% are under the age of 35.
3. 57% of all practicing attorneys in the State of Maine are located in one county – Cumberland County.
4. In fact 80% of Maine lawyers are located in 4 counties – Cumberland, Kennebec, Penobscot and York counties.

In the remaining 12 counties, most of the attorneys are 55 or older.

In 1990 the Maine Commission on Legal Needs chaired by the late Senator Ed Muskie found that legal aid providers were only able to provide services to 23% of eligible people.

A 2009 study found that the figure was 27% and in subsequent studies the number of people able to be served was never more than 25%.

The recent constitutional stalemate we have in criminal defense is emblematic of the problem. Over 500 criminal cases lack an attorney which are required to be appointed under the Sixth Amendment of the Constitution if a defendant can't afford one.

In Aroostook, Washington, Franklin, Oxford counties there are a handful of District Court attorneys. In Piscataquis, there are maybe 3 lawyers and they are all over the age of 60. And the situation is the same in the rest of the primarily rural counties of the State.

The situation denies justice in both criminal and civil cases for thousands of Mainers and erodes our justice system's ability to resolve disputes as well as public confidence in our justice system.

My proposal is for the University of Maine School of Law and the University of Maine to begin planning for a night law school program affiliated with Maine Law in Penobscot County.

Why a night law school program to complement our current legal education offerings?

When you figure more than half of the State's lawyers are in 4 counties – there is a real problem with serving the rest of the state.

I am a proud graduate of the University of Maine School of Law, a moot court debater, and the co-founder of the Maine Association for Public Interest Law (MAPIL), which provides scholarships and stipends to students working in public interest law. And my oldest daughter Caroline was recently accepted to Maine Law.

But not everyone who would be a great lawyer can afford the cost of leaving their job and relocating to Portland for school. To open up future opportunities for lawyers who can serve all of Maine, we need to offer a law school for people who have jobs during the day to support themselves and their families. It will open one of many important steps to provide more lawyers to people in need of representation and keep more lawyers in northern, eastern and central Maine.

We can't expect due process, individual rights, even freedom itself, to be defended & honored if we don't expand real access and recognize that legal education can and should happen beyond Portland in order for all Maine people to be served. I thank you all for your time and consideration, I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.