



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Rep. Allison Hepler is support of
**LD 2147, An Act to Provide Funding to Improve the College and Career
Readiness of Certain Students in Androscoggin and Oxford Counties**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Good morning, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Allison Hepler and I represent the towns of Arrowsic, Georgetown, Phippsburg, West Bath and Woolwich. I am here today to speak in support of **LD 2147, An Act to Provide Funding to Improve the College and Career Readiness of Certain Students in Androscoggin and Oxford Counties**.

I am in favor of this due to the recent termination of federal contracts with the University of Maine at Farmington (UMF) that supported River Valley Upward Bound and the students who participated.

As you may know, Upward Bound has been supporting low-income and first-generation Maine high school students for years. Its work in Maine schools has boosted high school graduation rates, and brought more opportunities to Maine students. Positioned in the rural western Maine foothills, UMF has done an outstanding job in working with our young people in areas typically beyond the easy reach of job and career opportunities. Upward Bound's work with these particular students led the 2023-24 cohort to achieve a 100% high school graduation rate, above Maine's state average of 88%.

I taught history at UMF for 26 years, four years of which overlapped with my service in the Legislature. While I knew that many of my students are first-generation, I did not know that 73% of UMF's population were eligible for some of the programs offered by Upward Bound, more commonly known as "Johnson Scholars" at UMF. I had many graduates in my classes. I always felt lucky to teach there because it was a microcosm of Maine. Students, many of them the first in their family to go to college, brought their unique experiences to this environment, and are paying it forward. Many are now teachers across Maine in our public schools, performing tremendous public service for Maine. All of us benefit from programs like these. We all know students like these. At UMF, one recent graduate, an advisee of mine, spent a "gap year" after UMF working as a committee clerk, then went to UMaine Law School and now works in Legal Services for the Elderly.

I was also proud to support two Johnson Scholars who were Maine Public Policy Scholars in the past couple of years. Policy Scholars, chosen from a pool of applicants on each campus across the state, are given the opportunity to take on a concern that may be taken up by Maine government. One of them, in fact, researched the impact of “first gen” programs.

Not every young person is ready for a four-year college but for those who are, this program benefits all of us in Maine. It will pay for itself many times over.

Thank you for your time and happy to answer any questions as I can.