

**University of Maine System Testimony 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 — Presented by UMS Chief
External & Governmental Affairs Officer Samantha Warren — January 21, 2026**

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) and a proud graduate of the University of Maine at Farmington (UMF).

Our System is **the state's most powerful engine of educational attainment and economic mobility**. Consistent with this, UMS serves 80% of the more than 6,000 TRIO recipients in the state — one-third of whom are middle and high school students who are not currently enrolled in Maine's public universities and may ultimately pursue postsecondary education elsewhere. TRIO is the suite of federally funded programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. ED) that prepares students who are low-income, first-generation, or have a disability for college and careers. All of Maine's public undergraduate universities have active TRIO programs, with some, such as my alma mater UMF, selected by U.S. ED to support multiple TRIO programs because of their **proven track record supporting student success**.

Upward Bound is one of these TRIO programs that UMF has effectively delivered since 1980. It is focused on supporting high school graduation and college-going for secondary students who are from families that are low-income (i.e., \$48,225 or less annual household income for a family of four) or in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree.

In 2012, UMF launched its River Valley Upward Bound program to serve students in six Oxford and Androscoggin County high schools (Mountain Valley, Telstar, Dirigo, Edward Little, Buckfield, and Oxford Hills Comprehensive). Through this program, UMF has provided eligible students with life-changing counseling and advising, college/career exploration, support applying for college and accessing financial aid, an annual summer residential experience at UMF (one-week or five-week options), and a college transition bridge week program. These services are offered at no cost to participating students and their families — for the benefit of the region and beyond. For example, as part of their career exploration activities last summer, participating students provided nearly 1,000 hours of community service at area organizations, including an assisted living facility, an early childhood education center, and a veterinary clinic.

On nearly all measures for which UMF must report outcomes to the federal government, **River Valley Upward Bound exceeded federal goals and even state outcomes**, with higher secondary school grade point averages and rates of graduation, college-going, and college completion. For example, the 2023-24 cohort **achieved a 100% high school graduation rate**, well above the state average of 88%, and **more than two-thirds pursued postsecondary education**, also above the state average.

Given these **impressive outcomes**, we were deeply disappointed when U.S. ED notified UMF

in September that it was canceling the two years remaining on the grant supporting River Valley Upward Bound. Our System's formal request for reconsideration was unfortunately unsuccessful. As a result, UMF no longer provides Upward Bound services to students formerly in its River Valley program, though its Western Maine Foothills Upward Bound program is currently active and the university remains an accessible, affordable local option for central and western Maine students to pursue high-quality, high-value higher education and opportunity.

Our System is grateful for the outpouring of support for the students, families, and schools impacted by this program termination. We appreciate Sen. Dusenbury and her bipartisan, bicameral colleagues **recognizing the incredible impact of UMF River Valley Upward Bound** and responding to this devastating loss by proposing to restore some services through LD 2147, *An Act to Provide Funding to Improve the College and Career Readiness of Certain Students in Androscoggin and Oxford Counties*.

As this Committee is aware, our System has had more than 130 federal awards paused or terminated over the past year. We have collaborated with Maine's Congressional Delegation, federal agencies, and other key partners to restore nearly 100 of these awards. When our appeals have been unsuccessful, we have worked to **mitigate impacts and move forward with education and research of vital importance to Maine and the nation**. We are also adapting and innovating to pursue new federal funding opportunities in areas where we have strength and can compete and lead, from advanced manufacturing R&D to STEM high school educator professional development.

We have not looked to the Legislature to replace lost federal funding, nor does UMS typically seek State appropriations for local initiatives. However, the River Valley Upward Bound program's service area has lower-than-state-average income levels, reading and math proficiency, and rates of high school graduation and postsecondary degree attainment. If the Legislature provided one-time funding to support students in the impacted schools, our System is committed to deploying those dollars in a high-impact manner consistent with the proven strategies of UMF Upward Bound to **build college and career readiness and the critical workforce pipeline that area employers depend on**.

Additionally, as the Legislature considers how to support these and similar students across the state, we encourage **increasing the ongoing investment in early college** — the State's existing program to raise college aspirations, promote academic achievement, and grow the size and skill of the Maine workforce. Through early college, thousands of students annually take courses through our public universities and Maine's community colleges while they are in high school, for credit and for free. Doing so helps them develop confidence, build study skills, and see postsecondary education as a place where they belong and will succeed. For example, graduation rates for rural students who enrolled in UMS early college and then in our public universities were 12 percentage points higher than those of their peers who did not participate.

I thank you for your ongoing support of the University of Maine System and our statewide efforts to promote prosperity through door-opening postsecondary education. I welcome your questions.