

Public Hearing 01/21/2026

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and the distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am testifying 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.

My name is Marietta Wheeler, I live in Belgrade, and I am testifying as a citizen of Maine and an Upward Bound alum. I attended the MSAD 11 (Gardiner) school district from first grade through graduating high school. I was blessed and fortunate enough to attend the Upward Bound program on the Bowdoin College campus in Brunswick in the summers of 1997, 1998, and 1999. To say Upward Bound, or UB, changed my life is an understatement. It completely changed the trajectory of where my life should have gone based on statistics.

I grew up in a family of five: my mom, my stepdad, and 2 older sisters. The second half of my childhood was volatile and chaotic, filled with emotional and verbal abuse along with a level of neglect. When I was nine my mom relapsed after having been sober for 8.5 years. Shortly after she started drinking again, my stepdad followed suit after 14 years of sobriety. There was no support, no encouragement, no guidance when it came to academics.

During my oldest sister's junior year, a friend told her about UB. My oldest sister applied for and got accepted into UB and attended in the summers of 1994 and 1995. My oldest sister being accepted opened the door for me and my middle sister to attend and we both did. UB provided me with an escape from my home life where I was accepted for just being me for the first time in my life. Having a safe space to be me opened me up to the idea that anything was possible by getting a college education.

Not only did UB prepare me for college, but it prepared me for the next two years in high school. UB also exposed me to a level of diversity I had never experienced before. I met other kids from Madawaska to Machias to Jonesport to Lewiston to Biddeford, all from low-income disadvantaged homes, like mine, all attending a program to make their futures' brighter.

My life since UB has taken a zig-zag path but I cannot even fathom where I would have ended up had I not attended UB. I got my bachelor's degree from UMA in May 2005 and started my career with the state at the Office of the State Auditor in November 2005 in a position that required a bachelor's degree. I just celebrated 20 years with the State with the last almost 13 years at the Bureau of the Budget, Department of Administrative and Financial Services. None of this would have been possible without the support I received through UB. The only downside of UB, in my opinion was that it worked so my children did not get to experience such an amazing, life-changing program. Because it worked for me,

facilitating me to get a college education, my children were ineligible as they were not the first generation in their family to get a college degree.

For children like me, UB is the only thing that will provide them with the support they need to be able to go to college. Providing the funding in this bill to continue the UB program that serves Androscoggin and Oxford Counties will help those kids not just while they're involved in the program, but will positively impact them for the rest of their lives.