

Elizabeth Hansen

Regarding LD 2147, An Act to Provide Funding to Improve the College and Career Readiness of Certain Students in Androscoggin and Oxford Counties.

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Good morning members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Elizabeth Hansen and I am a resident of Farmington. I am here to speak in favor of LD2147, "An Act to Provide Funding to Improve the College and Career Readiness of Certain Students in Androscoggin and Oxford Counties." I'm appearing on my own behalf and on my own time; for the sake of transparency, I am a current employee at UMaine Farmington with the Upward Bound program. All of my comments today are my own, and are in no way an official statement from the university and shouldn't be considered as such.

Upward Bound programs fall under the umbrella of TRIO, which, contrary to what the name implies, now includes eight federally funded programs. The purpose of Upward Bound is to provide participants with the skills and motivation necessary to complete a program of secondary education and to enter and succeed in a program of post-secondary education. Essentially, we are helping students graduate from high school and continue on to enroll in a certificate, associate, or bachelors degree program.

Students that participate in Upward Bound programs must meet one of more of the following qualifications:

- Be first-generation: an individual whose parents or legal guardians did not complete a bachelor's degree or who lived with and was supported by only one parent who did not complete a bachelor's degree
- Be low-income: family taxable income did not exceed 150% of the poverty level amount as set by the federal government
- Have another academic need: This could include rural isolation, a documented learning disability, living in a predominantly low-income community, lack of opportunity, support and/or guidance to take challenging college preparation courses, or a lack of confidence, self-esteem, and/or social skills

Any of these unique qualifications on their own have been shown to make post secondary attainment more challenging, and many Upward Bound participants are eligible multiple ways, stacking the odds even more against them. This is the case for many students that were being supported through the River Valley grant.

I am here today because I truly believe in these programs. This is my second professional role with a TRIO project - I was most recently working at a college in Oklahoma in their Student Support Services program, and it was there that I saw the transformative power that TRIO had for those students. When I returned to my home state of Maine last summer for this role at UMaine Farmington, I was excited and honored to become part of the legacy of these programs. Upward Bound at UMaine Farmington has existed since 1982 with the Foothills Upward Bound grant, which is still operating and supports 8 other high schools; the River Valley

Upward Bound grant became an additional component to the program in 2012 supporting the six schools included in this bill. This demonstrates decades of successfully meeting the objectives of the Upward Bound program, and it has been disheartening, to say the least, to witness and be affected by sweeping decisions made by the Department of Education.

Statistics from the River Valley grant demonstrate its success. Through participation in the project, the majority of students meet academic requirements of having a 2.5 GPA or higher, over half meet or exceed the proficient level on state assessments in reading/language arts and math, minimal cases of students dropping out of high school, and students persisting to the next grade level or graduation as appropriate. In the current 5-year grant cycle, nearly 3/4th of participants enrolled in some form of post secondary education immediately following high school graduation. This program works!

Having to break the news to my team, and then to our summer staff, school liaisons and community partners was extremely hard. Having to share this news with River Valley students was heartbreakin. We experienced a range of emotions - confusion, anger, sadness, isolation, fear, disappointment, discomfort. Students were in tears; they shared their fears that this would mean they would not make it to college now. Some students cannot even afford the college application fees, which are waived nationwide by many institutions for students that participate in Upward Bound. They are now missing out on the services and support offered by the program, such as academic preparation for college, free tutoring, college visits, assistance with applying for student financial aid and scholarships, other financial literacy education, and a residential summer program to help prevent "summer melt." The latter occurs significantly higher in low income high school graduates, where those that intend to start college in the fall ultimately fail to enroll due to administrative hurdles, financial confusion, and lack of support. It is a major retention challenge, often stemming from missing deadlines, financial aid issues, feeling overwhelmed, or not knowing how to access support. This is a large component of our summer program that River Valley students will no longer have the chance to participate in.

We care deeply about students in Maine, and we want to help close the gap for those that want to get to college or obtain professional skills. Another year of funding to support eligible students from Buckfield Junior-Senior High School, Dirigo High School, Edward Little High School, Mountain Valley High School, Oxford Hills Comprehensive High School and Telstar High School in Androscoggin and Oxford counties would allow us to continue this work, and would be a strong indicator to these deserving students that Mainers take care of each other.

I am very appreciative to Senator Duson for her presentation of this bill, the cosponsorship from Representative Murphy, Senators Bennett and Bickford, and Representative Hepler, as well as to the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs for hearing these testimonies today. Thank you very much.