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## TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 2099

### AN ACT TO AMEND CERTAIN ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS RECEIVING STATE SUBSIDIES FOR POSTSECONDARY COURSES

January 28, 2026

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am Eric Waddell, Executive Director for Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association in opposition to L.D. 2099. While our associations fully understand the need for this bill, we are concerned that it could potentially limit college and career opportunities for certain Maine students – particularly those in rural communities.

Early College programming has become a vital and integral learning opportunity for Maine high school students, and particularly those in rural schools. Thousands of Maine high school students are enrolled in Early College courses, and these programs have undoubtedly had a positive impact on their academic experience and career & college aspirations. Students who enroll in early college:

- Are introduced to more rigorous coursework
- Are more likely to persist into their second year of college
- Save money on college courses, those helping to address the college debt crisis.

These benefits are particularly apparent for Maine's rural students, who often don't have the same access to advanced coursework as their peers in larger schools with greater resources. In some high schools, Early College is one of the only options that students have to pursue their interests and discover potential college & career options.

Here are a few examples of that impact we heard from rural districts:

- At Fort Kent Community High School in the St. John Valley, students engage in online and hybrid Early College courses, as well as dual-enrollment courses where teachers deliver in person, on site instruction during the school day. For the class of 2025, 88 percent of students successfully completed at least one college course, and students earned 846 college credits, representing an estimated \$219,960 in tuition savings.
- At Ashland Community High School, a quarter of this year's graduating seniors are enrolled in Early College, and 3 have earned more than 18 credits. Principal Joel Hall says the school has only one math teacher and one science teacher due to low numbers, but Early College courses have allowed students to experience college level rigor.

As Joel says: *"We are in a time when many students are avoiding college for the sole reason that they do not want to accumulate large amounts of student debt. If the program allows us to increase numbers while decreasing their overall debt and fear of the unknown, then it is vital for the program to be funded at a level that allows for the students to access the programming."*

While we understand that L.D. 2099 seeks to provide more predictability, equity, and sustainability in Maine's Early College program, we do have concerns that the bill's 18-credit limit could harm some of the students who benefit most from this program.

According to data from the University of Maine System, more than 600 Maine students from the Class of 2025 accumulated more than 18 credits of Early College courses. In rural communities like Fort Kent and Caribou, more than a dozen students in the Class of 2025 surpassed that number. Compare that to districts like Falmouth and Yarmouth, where only a few students went over the 18-credit mark. We worry that limiting this program could create inequities that would harm rural communities the most.

Maine students should be supported and encouraged in their desire to complete advanced coursework without the burden of student debt. Our Associations worry that L.D. 2099 could cement provisions into law creating barriers for students in their pursuit of college & career goals.

Instead of the 18-credit limit, our associations would propose that the legislature look at ways to boost funding for Maine's Early College program. This would help to preserve early college programming for all Maine students and strengthen a program with proven success across all of Maine.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.