

State of Maine  
Department of Education

Testimony of Michael Perry, Director, Office of Higher Education and Educator Supports

In Support of: L.D. 2098

An Act to Update Certain Higher Education Statutes

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Sponsored by: Representative Sargent

Date: February 18, 2026

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Michael Perry, and I am here today representing the Maine Department of Education speaking in support of L.D. 2098, An Act to Update Certain Higher Education Statutes.

This bill adds initial application fees for out-of-state higher education institutions applying for degree-granting authorization or program approval in Maine. Maine is one of a minority of states that does not collect fees of any kind from applicant institutions, which has the effect of weakening consumer protections against potentially low-quality or predatory institutions in Maine. The bill also gives the Higher Education Administration Fund the authority to receive the fees.

The processes for degree granting authorization and program approval are both spelled out in 05-071 Rule Chapter 149: *Procedures for Obtaining Authorization for Institutions of Higher Education to Confer Academic Degrees or to Offer Degree Courses/Programs in the State of Maine*. The process is time- and labor-intensive and relies primarily on work capacity from the Department of Education and on the volunteer efforts of a review committee composed of professionals from institutions of higher education at existing Maine institutions. The Department coordinates the process and delivers the review committee's findings to the State Board of Education for a final vote. The State has seen an increase in applications for institutional approvals in Maine during the past three years, and a lack of Department capacity and review committee volunteers has created a potential bottleneck for institutions seeking state approval.

LD 2098 may generate a modest savings to the Maine Department of Education, and only in years when a new institution applies for initial applications. The following breakdown of revenues is an estimate based on other similar sized states and cross referenced with the labor required for these types of reviews:

- Out of State, with Physical Presence: \$1,000
- In State, New Institution with Physical Presence: \$500
- Out of State, not SARA Participants, no Physical Presence: \$250

LD 2098 would also allow the State Board of Education to avoid duplicative institutional reviews in specific circumstances. Under the current Rule Chapter 149, an institution looking to move from temporary, program-based approval in Maine to full degree-granting authorization would need to undergo a new state review with a new review committee report using exactly the same standards and evidence. LD 2098 would allow the State Board to forego that duplicate review at their own discretion if an institution has already passed a state review in the last five years.

For these reasons, the Maine Department of Education is in support of L.D. 2098, An Act to Update Certain Higher Education Statutes. I am happy to answer any questions the Committee may have, and I will be available for work sessions on this bill.