



**TESTIMONY BY JASON JUDD  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, EDUCATE MAINE**

**TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEES ON APPROPRIATIONS AND  
FINANCIAL AFFAIRS AND EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS**

**FRIDAY, FEB. 20, 2026, 10 A.M.  
HIGHER EDUCATION & DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

**FOR**

**L.D. 2122, An Act Making Unified Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027**

Chairs Rotundo, Gattine, Rafferty, and Murphy, and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs Committees, I am Jason Judd, Executive Director of Educate Maine. Educate Maine is a business-led education advocacy organization focused on championing career readiness by increasing the educational attainment of Maine people. I am here today to testify in support of L.D. 2122.

I want to highlight our support for three parts of the supplemental budget: the investment in Maine's higher education institutions including making free community college permanent, support for 55% of the total cost of K-12 education, and the increases in minimum teacher pay.

Maine needs to continue to grow our workforce so that we can grow our economy. Maine's higher education institutions work closely with employers to make sure they are developing and executing training programs that help address our workforce shortages. Educate Maine was one of the founding organizations of MaineSpark, the coalition focused on helping Maine reach 60% of adults with degrees or credentials of value. Investing in Maine's higher education institutions will help more people gain the credentials needed to thrive in our workforce and directly support the state attainment goal. Our public universities and colleges need to be prioritized in the supplemental budget.

We strongly support making free community college permanent. The initial investment in free community college helped more than 22,000 Maine students access postsecondary pathways. The past investment in this program led to increased enrollment for young men, similar retention rates compared to other programs, and strong outcomes for transfer students. Making this investment in supporting free community college will help Maine come closer to achieving our state attainment goal and make sure learners are well-prepared for success in the workforce.

The supplemental budget includes maintaining the state's obligation to pay 55% of local education costs. This investment is essential to make sure students are supported appropriately in communities across Maine as well as keep property taxes reasonable. Supporting our local schools is essential especially as federal resources become limited.

Increasing minimum teacher pay is one of the important investments we can make to support teachers across Maine. We launched the Teach Maine Center in 2023 which is focused on supporting Maine's teacher workforce. As part of the initial planning, we traveled across Maine meeting with educators about their experiences in the field. We heard over and over again about the need to increase wages to attract more people to the profession and keep talented teachers working in our schools. The average salary for a teacher in Maine is the lowest in New England. The average starting salary in Maine is just \$42,000. The reality is that we are losing great potential teachers because of the low wages in the profession. We have to address wages to attract more people into the teaching. As we know it's the teachers who help make sure students have strong outcomes and are ready to thrive in postsecondary education and the workforce.

Thank you for prioritizing these investments to support learners, educators, and our local communities.