

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and other members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and other esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is C. Matt Graham. I live in Lewiston, and I serve as an Associate Professor at the University of Maine. I'm here today to testify on the Governor's supplemental budget proposal. As an educator, I appreciate the additional funding for public education in our state, but I am also concerned about what it NOT included in the proposal.

I want to focus on one central point: Early College: Maine's Aspirations Program. It's the most effective and equitable pathway we have for helping students transition into higher education and the workforce. Maine has set a statewide goal of increasing the number of residents with a credential of value, and this program is one of the most reliable tools we have to reach that goal.

I see the impact every semester. When high school students step into a college classroom, something shifts. For many, especially first-generation students, Early College is the moment when college stops feeling hypothetical and starts feeling real. It's not just about earning free credits. It's about building confidence, gaining momentum, and seeing a clear path forward.

And the benefits are tangible. Thousands of Maine students are participating right now. Many enter college with nearly a semester already completed, saving families thousands of dollars and reducing student debt.

Just as importantly, Early College is increasingly connecting students with high-demand fields, including healthcare and cybersecurity, fields I teach in, strengthening Maine's workforce pipeline at a time when the state urgently needs it.

But recent legislation, LD 2099 moves in the opposite direction. By adding new restrictions, it would functionally cap or slow participation. In a state facing a labor shortage and an aging population, we should be accelerating young people toward credentials and careers. Not putting up barriers. As others have said, limiting access here is "penny-wise and pound-foolish." We hope the Legislature will reject efforts to cap the early college courses high school students can take, and instead fund this program properly so all students who want to can take early college courses.

If Maine is serious about educational attainment and workforce development, protecting and expanding this program is one of the smartest investments we can make.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to Maine students. I'm happy to answer any questions.