

Testimony of Sara Abronze

In Reference to LD 2212: The Supplemental Budget

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 Sara Abronze, and I work at the University of Southern Maine as a Grants & Contracts Technology Manager. I live in Sanford and work on USM's Portland Campus. I am here representing myself today to testify neither for nor against LD 2212.

I want to state my clear support for the Governor's focus on the education continuum, including raising the Minimum Teacher Salary to \$50,000, maintaining 55% Education Funding, making Free Community College permanent, and providing \$2 million for UMaine Research Innovation.

However, I am here today specifically to discuss the Early College program. I grew up in Aroostook County, where "going anywhere" usually meant a 45-minute drive. In rural Maine, geographical isolation often dictates your level of opportunity. When you live in a community where resources are spread thin, the "pathway to college" isn't always visible.

Growing up, I knew I wanted more from my education. I felt a deep need to be challenged—not just to stay busy, but to ensure I was prepared for the rigors of college. I was one of the lucky ones. I attended Limestone Community High School, which was right next door to the Maine School of Science and Mathematics. Because of that proximity, I was able to access the advanced coursework and opportunities I craved—opportunities that weren't available to many of my peers in neighboring towns. That exposure didn't just give me credits; it gave me the confidence to succeed.

But success for a Maine student shouldn't depend on being "lucky" enough to live next door to a specialized school. Early College is the Great Equalizer. Yet, just last week the Education Committee debated LD 2099, *An Act to Amend Certain Eligibility Requirements for Secondary Students Receiving State Subsidies for Postsecondary Courses*. This bill proposed a cap the number of early college courses high school students could complete, rather than address the real underlying issue – the current state appropriation is not sufficient to meet the need for this critical program. According to the UMS Spring 2025 Early College Report, this program is more vital than ever:

- At the University of Maine at Fort Kent, Early College now makes up 18.6% of their total undergraduate credit hours.

- Statewide, students in this program have a 91-93% success rate. This isn't just "giving money away"—it is funding a program where students are overwhelmingly succeeding.
- On average, a participating student enters a 4-year university with 11 earned credit hours, saving Maine families thousands of dollars in future debt.

The current \$5.5 million annual appropriation is simply not enough to meet the demand or the actual costs of delivery. To ensure our students are prepared for the future, an additional \$2.5 million more is required. Currently, the UMaine System is already subsidizing these courses and the reimbursement from the state in no way covers the actual cost to UMS or the regular cost of the credit, which has resulted layoffs.

Early College is a proven catalyst for retention and persistence. It ensures Maine will benefit from the next generation of Nurses, Engineers, and Cybersecurity Analysts. I urge the Committees to honor the Governor's proposals while also ensuring we do not underfund the "on-ramp" to higher education. Please ensure that every Maine student has the chance to be challenged and provided with opportunities, regardless of their zip code.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions.