

Liam Anderson
Orono
LD 512

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and other members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, My name is Liam Anderson and I am a junior Early Childhood Education Student at the University of Maine in Orono, and I am here to testify in support of LD 512, An Act to Promote Student Enrollment and Degree Completion in the University of Maine System by Providing Tuition Waivers to Eligible Students.

As an aspiring educator, studying to become the best teacher I can be in the midst of a teacher shortage crisis; there is a weight on my shoulders. There is a weight on all of our shoulders as a new generation of educators enters the profession. We are making sacrifices financially with the weight of student debt and low entry salary looming over us everyday. When I was evaluating my future, I made the conscious decision to take on these hardships that education majors face— because the passion I have for making a difference in the classroom and in the community sang a lot louder. I chose to value my education above the anxieties of future tuition debt and the stress of present financial instability.

And as me, and the education students I am representing today, continue to make these sacrifices to help take on this teacher shortage directly, our numbers only continue to deteriorate. The college of education and human development has faced concerning enrollment decline over the past 5 years. The solution to the teacher shortage: the next generation of teachers; they are struggling to financially justify going to our universities to receive critical knowledge, build essential skills, and establish meaningful career relationships.

These numbers are partly because students are abandoning four year university opportunities, because they just can't afford the financial burden when made to compete with free. Many of our college students are foregoing critical opportunities for career advancement, access to masters and doctoral programs, as well as study-abroad experiences that our universities provide. Not to mention our students are losing equitable access to the social relationships, moral development, and the opportunity to find themselves; losing equitable access to make a career impact in their field of study at a four year university.

Tomorrow I will be turning just 20 years old. I am just scratching the surface of what I hope to be an extensive and impactful career in education. And it is because of the opportunities the four year University of Maine in Orono has given me that I find myself here before you today supporting this bill, and in turn advocating for every student looking to pursue higher education in the state of Maine. And every student in the state of Maine deserves their own opportunity, and these tuition waivers can provide an equitable opportunity, parallel and justifiable to our free community college program, for all of our youth to go out and make a difference in this world.

Thank you.