



**Written Testimony by William Norbert  
Governmental Affairs and Communications Manager**

**Neither For Nor Against L.D. 1608**

***An Act to Address Teacher Shortages Through Financial Assistance  
and Career Advancement Opportunities***

**April 20, 2023**

**Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs**

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

My name is Bill Norbert. I am the Governmental Affairs and Communications Manager at the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME). I live in Brunswick and am submitting this written testimony Neither For Nor Against L.D. 1608, *An Act to Address Teacher Shortages Through Financial Assistance and Career Advancement Opportunities*.

This bill proposes three things:

1. It provides ongoing funds of \$1 million beginning in fiscal year 2024-25 to the Department of Education, General Purpose Aid for Local Schools program to support the Maine Teacher Residency Program at the University of Southern Maine and authorizes the Commissioner of Education to expend and disburse funds for that purpose;
2. **It provides that the maximum loan per academic year under the Educators for Maine Program be \$8,000 for undergraduate students and students pursuing postbaccalaureate certification;** and
3. It requires the Maine Education Policy Research Institute to study the development of career ladders for educators.

I write concerning Section 1 of the bill only, the portion concerning the Educators for Maine Program, which is administered by FAME.

The Educators for Maine Program offers merit-based forgivable loans for Maine students pursuing initial certification as a teacher, including speech pathology or a career in child development. Award amounts are based on available funding and are subject to change annually, but not less than \$3,000 for undergraduate students and not less than

\$2,000 for graduate students. The governing statute allows us flexibility to award higher amounts based on available funding. For academic year 22-23, available funds allowed us to increase awards to \$5,000/year for undergraduates and \$4,000/year for graduate students. Loans are forgiven if the recipient is an educator or speech pathologist in an eligible elementary or secondary school or a quality childcare program in the state of Maine. Loan recipients who are Jobs for Maine's Graduates specialists may also be eligible for forgiveness in this program.

Our concern with the bill as drafted is that it caps the maximum award amounts for both undergraduate and graduate students. Although available funding may not in the future allow us to award up to that proposed cap of \$8,000, if it ever does, we would like to have the flexibility as we do now to maximize awards. Our preference would be, in the absence of any new funding, to keep the current statute as is and we will continue to set award levels based on available funds.

I have spoken with the sponsor of the bill, Senator Pierce. My understanding is that she wishes to remove the section concerning the Educators for Maine Program from the bill as it does not reflect her intent. We support that move and hope you will be able to accommodate her wishes.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments.