

Britton L. Wolfe

**Testimony in support of LD 2131, An Act to Support Extended Learning Opportunities
Education and Cultural Affairs Committee**

Wed. Jan. 24, 2024

Good morning,

My name is Britton Wolfe. I am the principal of Sacopee Valley High School in MSAD 55, which serves the towns of Cornish, Hiram, Porter, Baldwin, and Parsonsfield. This spring I will be completing my Doctorate of Education degree in educational leadership from the University of Maine. I recently completed my dissertation, which is entitled *I Wish I Knew Then What I Know Now: A Case Study of the Experiences and Perceptions of Community Partners Working with an Extended Learning Opportunities Program at a Small, Rural High School*.

I am sure that you will be hearing from various citizens, teachers, and officials about the value of ELO's as an important part of Maine high school students' education. ELO's are valuable because the learning is a)personalized, b)authentic, c)hands-on, d)related to career exploration, e)often interdisciplinary, and f)community-based. It is this last attribute that I feel I have some expertise and insight to offer the Committee.

As we all know, Maine is one of the most rural states in the U.S. and outmigration in search of economic opportunity by youth and young adults is one of the major challenges we face. The state's Department of Economic and Community Development published a 10 year strategic plan in 2019 subtitled: A Focus on Talent and Innovation. The report states that in order for Maine to continue to compete for jobs and business in the global economy, we must both attract and develop talent in a multitude of increasingly technical fields including health care, manufacturing, tourism, agriculture, the various trades, and education. Maine's Life and Career Readiness standards, which

were published in 2020, were developed in part to help support the goals of the state's economic development plan.

ELO's are an important tool to enable students to meet the Life and Career Readiness Standards and also to make students aware of good job opportunities in their hometowns. In the course of my dissertation research I talked with community partners who had served as career exploration mentors with students, and what they told me is that there were two major motivating factors that led them to volunteer in this capacity. The first was altruism, a desire to "pay it forward" and help one or more young people learn about a rewarding career. The second was workforce development, specifically the need to recruit talented young people to work in their field or industry. Often the people I interviewed saw these two goals as being interrelated.

One of the community partners I interviewed owns a local HVAC business, and he talked about how HVAC is a great trade with earning potential similar to that of electricians and plumbers but with fewer licensing requirements. He described how he has more work demand than he has time to do it in, and he would like to expand his business by hiring another technician but hasn't been able to find a local person with the right qualifications. He thought that if he can help teach a few local kids about the opportunities available right here, it's a win-win-win: Helps the kids, helps him, and maybe helps the community retain a few more local young people.

One last thing I would like to mention: Because Maine is very rural and has the oldest population of any U.S. state, the percentage of households in most communities with children enrolled in the local schools is low compared to other states with more urban and suburban municipalities. School-community partnerships such as ELO

programs are especially important in Maine because they connect students with members of the community and help build relationships between the schools and local businesses and organizations. This is critical to our ability to maintain public support for our local schools, because as I said the majority of taxpayers do not have children enrolled in their local schools.

In closing, ELO's are a proven tool to achieve economic growth through talent and innovation, which is exactly what Maine needs at this time.

Thank you!

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LD 2131

I am a candidate for a doctoral degree in education at the University of Maine and recently completed my dissertation on the topic of Extended Learning Opportunities. Please see the attached testimony document.