

Dave Patterson Testimony for LD 1629
May 13, 2021

I want to start by thanking the committee for hearing my testimony on behalf of the passage of LD 1629 and in support of Kris Cooper.

I have been a high school English Teacher in Maine for 16 years at Lawrence High School in Fairfield, Lake Region High School in Naples, and, most recently, Gorham High School for the past decade. Shortly after I started teaching in the state I heard a Maine politician on the news tell a reporter that Maine's biggest export is our educated youth. Over the past decade and a half, I've had a front row seat to this exportation. It's always been a strange experience teaching honors level students—helping to push them to their impressive, boundless potential—the entire time thinking the better they do, the higher the chance they won't return to the state when they graduate college. The reality is that students who work hard in our public schools are destined for great colleges, some of which cost upwards of \$75,000 to \$80,000 per year. I've seen the brightest students I've taught be accepted to Tufts, Northeastern, Middlebury, Carnegie Mellon, and Yale, among many other prestigious and criminally expensive colleges. These students are shackled with massive debt upon graduating. Many of them find that moving back to Maine is not economically feasible.

As an example, there was a recent graduate of Gorham High School whom I had in multiple classes over her four years. She is wildly intelligent, thoughtful, and hardworking. She earned the salutatorian rank of her class and was accepted to a private school in the Boston area. One day in my class she was looking at the financial aid package from her school. She showed me and I said, "Wow, they are giving you so much money." To which she replied, "Yeah, but look at what it costs every year." She pointed to a number near \$80,000 on the screen. It knocked the air out of my lungs. At the end of the year when I helped her write her salutatorian speech for graduation I couldn't help but feel I was helping her write a farewell letter to Maine

With the passage of LD 1629, however, Maine has a chance to bring one of its own home. I was in attendance in the cramped gymnasium at Winthrop High School when my now-brother-in-law, Kris Cooper, graduated as the salutatorian of his class in 2007. Four years later I sat in the sprawling athletic complex at UMO when he graduated as the valedictorian. I was in awe as

hundreds and hundreds of students marched across the stage, thinking that Kris had achieved a grade point average higher than every single one of his classmates. I'm still astounded by this accomplishment.

I'd be lying if from that moment, I didn't think, *Kris can't possibly return to Maine. The big opportunities await somewhere else.*

But Kris has always assured his family that Maine is where his heart is. He's never wavered from his commitment to return home, not at the University of Connecticut for dental school or the University of Pittsburgh medical school.

Now here he is, a proud, talented son of Maine, ready to return home, and he finds himself being turned away by a statute that bars him from obtaining a medical license, while every other state than his own will gladly embrace his expertise, hard work, and kind heart.

I urge the committee to pass LD 1629 and not make Kris Cooper and other Mainers in his field seek a professional life elsewhere. Please use your power to stop the exportation of our educated youth in this case.

Thank you.