



DATE: Feb. 17, 2021
TO: Committee on State and Local Government
FROM: Samantha Warren, UMS Director of Government & Community Relations
RE: **LD 158, *An Act To Eliminate Inactive Boards and Commissions***

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government:

I am writing today on behalf of the University of Maine System (UMS) to recommend that the State Education and Employment Outcomes Task Force (SEEO) not be discontinued at this time as proposed by LD 158, *An Act To Eliminate Inactive Boards and Commissions*.

The SEEO demonstrated its potential when its work led to the development of the Maine Education and Attainment Research Navigation System, known as Maine EARNs. Hosted by the Maine Department of Labor, this interactive website connects data from our system and Maine's community colleges (MCCS) with State employment/wage records. While there is a considerable lag in the data, this tool empowers Maine students and families to make informed choices about their college and career pathways while ensuring tuition and taxpayers know the labor market return that can be expected on their investment in public higher education.

While the SEEO has been recently inactive due to insufficient membership, as Maine confronts serious workforce shortages that affect our economy's ability to recover from the pandemic, we believe its duties of bringing transparency and accountability to postsecondary educational outcomes so stakeholders can make data-driven decisions has never been more important.

To this end and building upon Maine EARNs, a long-needed effort to integrate Maine's PK-12, postsecondary and employment data into a comprehensive statewide longitudinal data system is finally coming together, led by the Maine Department of Education and guided by representatives from the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, the State Workforce Investment Board and UMS. We also understand several appointments to the task force were recently made, including by Speaker Fecteau to install Rep. Seth Berry and Rep. Paul Stearns. Given this, we encourage the SEEO to meet as soon as the current members are able, be updated on the various initiatives outlined above, and then as a group make a recommendation on the future of the task force.

By statute, a representative of UMS serves on the SEEO. Our Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Success and Credential Attainment has served in that role since the creation of the task force (her previous title was Chief Student Affairs Officer). If this Committee determines the SEEO should continue, she and the UMS is committed to being an active participant.

Please let me know if I can provide additional information on behalf of Maine's public universities.