



**Testimony of Behalf of the University of Maine System  
In Support of Governor's Proposed FY21 Supplemental Budget (LD 42)  
Presented by Ryan Low, UMS Vice Chancellor for Finance & Administration  
Jan. 27, 2021**

Senators Breen and Daughtry, Representatives Pierce and Brennan, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs: My name is Ryan Low and I am the Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration for the University of Maine System. I am here today to speak in strong support of the \$2.5 million in State appropriation proposed in Governor Mills' FY21 supplemental budget (Part C-3) to maintain early college opportunities that have been so critical to Maine high schools and their students, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Early college allows Maine students to earn credit through the state's public universities and community colleges while they are still in high school and at no cost to them. UMS early college courses are delivered by our faculty on our campuses or online (often referred to as "aspirations") or by local high school teachers supported by our faculty whose students are concurrently earning secondary and postsecondary credit (referred to as "dual enrollment"). Participating students are more likely to pursue postsecondary education, earn their degree in a timely manner, and enter the Maine workforce prepared and with less student debt.

While UMS early college benefits all learners, it improve outcomes most for those who are traditionally underserved. Students who come to our universities from rural schools are 25% more likely to graduate on-time if they have some UMS early college credits and Maine students of color are nearly twice as likely to graduate on-time from our System as their peers who have not participated in early college. As one Washington County parent whose two children participated noted during a recent UMS legislative update, "Early college levels the playing field for all Maine students."

In the 2019-20 academic year, nearly 4,200 students – more than half of whom were attending rural high schools – earned a combined 24,116 college credits.

Using targeted education funds provided by the Legislature to support early college, the Maine Department of Education reimburses our universities for about half the credit hour cost and the UMS waives the remainder, which in FY20 alone amounted to about \$3.3 million. (Maine Community College System courses are fully reimbursed.) While student demand has exceeded the annual \$4 million early college appropriation in recent years and the DOE has generously found other funds internally to cover the overage, an explosion in enrollment because of the pandemic has necessitated this \$2.5 million supplemental appropriation (Part C-3, Postsecondary course payments).

UMS universities alone experienced a 162% year-over-year increase in credits earned by Maine high school students through our online and on-campus early college programs this past summer, and a 42% increase in the fall. This growth is directly attributed to Maine high schools turning to our institutions to fill gaps created by in-person class size limitations, hybrid schedules, and teacher shortages due to educators being out for quarantine/isolation, family or medical leave, as well as students increasing their course load due to the loss of employment and extracurricular commitments. For example, one school counselor in eastern Maine noted

that reduced classroom occupancy due to State guidelines resulted in “skyrocketing” participation among his students in early college classes offered at the University of Maine and a western Maine high school transitioned 45 students from courses they typically offered to those offered online by the University of Maine at Fort Kent. As a result, 90 percent of the Department’s FY21 appropriation to support early college has already been exhausted, leaving just \$423,963 for spring and early summer courses – far short of the \$2.5 million reimbursed to the UMS and Maine Community College System in the same period in FY20.

This supplemental funding will ensure we can deliver these essential early college courses to the hundreds of Maine high school students who have enrolled already in record numbers for the spring semester that started this week, and whose schools are depending on us to provide them.

We understand that it will not allow the State to subsidize summer semester courses. UMS is currently working with the community colleges to finalize an arrangement by which eligible students will be able to receive one free course, with our public institutions fully waiving tuition and mandatory fees as part of our commitment to Maine students and their futures.

Maine’s public universities are proud that our early college program has been such a lifeline during the pandemic, and are appreciative of the Maine DOE and Governor Mills for their leadership and investment in Maine students, including by expanding early college access during these unprecedented times. On behalf of the thousands of Maine students and nearly every Maine high school that benefit from this program, we urge your support of this request.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify today and look forward to answering your questions.