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**TESTIMONY of SENATOR JUSTIN ALFOND  
In Support Of**

**L.D. 215, "An Act To Improve Student Retention in Maine's Postsecondary Institutions"**

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Justin Alfond. I am a resident of Portland, I am honored to represent Senate District 27 which includes most of Portland and the islands of Peaks, Cliff and Great Diamond. Today, I am pleased to appear before you as the sponsor of L.D. 215, "An Act To Improve Student Retention in Maine's Postsecondary Institutions."

When I first elected in the Senate, I had the honor of serving as Chair of this committee. During that time, I saw first-hand the incredible impact that Jobs for Maine's Graduates (JMG) has had on thousands of Maine students over more than twenty years. JMG is one of the strongest organizations of its kind in the country, and JMG students are a success story across Maine's middle and high schools.

Last session this committee focused on how difficult it can be to afford higher education. And while we know many students drop out of school because they can't afford it, there are many reasons a student decides to leave. Some of the more common reasons a student leaves school is the lack of personal attention, guidance and support.

Support systems and real relationships are so crucial for students -- especially with so many students entering as first generation or in really complicated situations. I'm sure we all remember being overwhelmed at some point at school, needing guidance or feeling pressure by our friends back home to not go back to school. It's at these critical junctures, a student needs support systems, a sounding board and someone they can trust.

When I learned that JMG was partnering with Thomas College to help JMG students stay in school and get their college degree, I was excited. And today you will hear more about the Thomas College pilot, how it works, why it makes sense to expand to other campuses, and how JMG is the only entity with all of the existing relationships and partnerships to support these students in the most effective ways.

I put forward this bill because I believe JMG is the right partner for Maine college and university campuses to help meet the needs of some of our highest risk students and help them increase their chance at success in college. This program will serve a focused group of students that face overwhelming barriers through no fault of their own, like foster care youth and older youth who have earned a high school equivalent degree. JMG is a great match because they can build on their existing relationships while providing the highest standards for academic success. That's why this partnership makes so much sense.

The bill asks for \$250,000 per year that will be matched with private dollars to create these JMG-campus partnerships. It has broad, bipartisan support, from Speaker Eves and myself, to Governor LePage, President Thibodeau, and Representative Fredette. And it will help students succeed; and when they succeed, our communities and businesses benefit.

One final thing: in the original drafting of the bill, the language inadvertently limited the number of campuses to 4 and the number of students served to 200. There's no reason to limit the potential partnerships between JMG and Maine campuses, so I'd like to offer a technical amendment to LD 215 to remove that language and allow for more flexibility.

I'd like to thank the committee for your time, and am happy to answer any questions you may have.