

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 14, 2017

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202-8510

RE: University of Maine at Presque Isle's Upward Bound Grant Applications
#P047A170346 and #P047A170352

Dear Secretary DeVos:

We are writing to support the applications submitted by the University of Maine at Presque Isle (UMPI) for two grants under the fiscal year 2017 Upward Bound Program competition and to express our strong concern that the Department of Education has determined that these applications are ineligible for consideration. As strong supporters of the TRIO programs, we were particularly troubled to learn that UMPI's applications were ruled ineligible due an unintentional, minor formatting oversight, which UMPI has not been given an opportunity to correct. According to UMPI, the Department's decision risks, over the next five years, denying 960 disadvantaged high school students the chance to fulfill their academic potentials.

The Notice Inviting Applications for New Awards (Notice) for the Upward Bound Program competition, published in the *Federal Register* on October 17, 2016, includes formatting criteria not mandated by Congress. They are arbitrarily drawn, entirely unrelated to the substance of the application, and do not provide any recourse for applicants to correct minor, unintentional, non-substantive mistakes.

UMPI has applied for two Upward Bound Program grants, and both have been deemed ineligible for the same reason. We understand that the Department has relayed to UMPI that a line-spacing error, appearing within two info-graphics on two of the application's 65 pages, is the cause of the ineligibility determination, as these two pages do not comply with the Notice's double-spacing requirement. These info-graphics are intended to help the reader review the application efficiently and more easily and contain text that is 1.5 line spaced instead of double spaced. It is obvious that the figures merely supplement a well-prepared narrative. Were they removed, or were UMPI permitted to adjust the line spacing on these two pages, the application would easily warrant the Department's review. Yet unbelievably, the Department refuses to review UMPI's application and has provided no opportunity for UMPI to correct this trivial mistake. We strongly urge the Department to reconsider its decision and to allow UMPI's application to be read and scored.

We appreciate that the formatting standards issued by the Department are intended to prevent applicants from attempting to gain an unfair advantage by using clever formatting strategies. When the application is reviewed as a whole, it is clear that UMPI is not seeking to

mislead the Department or to gain any unfair advantage. In fact, the error was so insignificant that UMPI could not immediately identify it and had to seek additional guidance. Now, the Department's inflexible and bureaucratic decision could result in the elimination of a long-standing, successful, and greatly needed program on the basis of a non-substantive error before the application is even read.

The Department has not identified for UMPI any other errors in its application. To deny UMPI's application a reading because two figures do not meet an arbitrary typographical format ignores the spirit of the Upward Bound Program, is antithetical to congressional intent, and would seriously jeopardize the future success of hundreds of students in Maine.

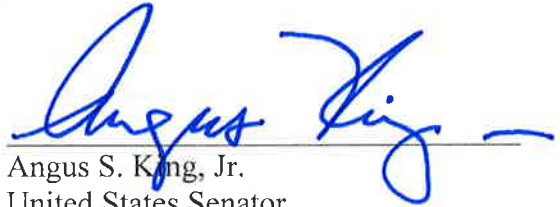
The Upward Bound Program at UMPI serves 129 high school students across Aroostook County, Maine, and has a strong and long record of success in sending local low-income, first-generation students to college. Since 1980, it has helped students with great needs access the promise of higher education.

We strongly urge the Department to apply some common sense to the Upward Bound Program competition and read and score UMPI's applications.

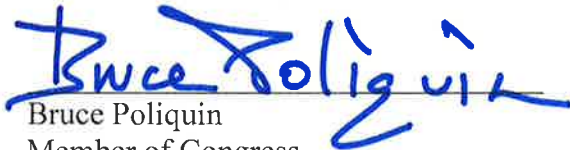
Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Bruce Poliquin
Member of Congress



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress