

**TESTIMONY OF
Dr. John Fitzsimmons, President
Maine Community College System**

**Before the Joint Select Committee on
Maine's Workforce and Economic Future**

Regarding L.D. 90, "An Act to Strengthen Maine's Work Force and Economic Future"

Monday, March 18, 2013

Senator Goodall, Representative Berry, and Honorable Members of the Joint Select Committee on Maine's Workforce and Economic Future, good morning, I'm John Fitzsimmons, President of the Maine Community College System and I'm here to testify in support of LD 90.

I would like to begin by thanking President Alford and Speaker Eves for creating this Joint Select Committee to focus on one of the most important issues Maine is facing – the skills gap. I have spent the last 35 years of my professional life working to prepare and help Maine people find meaningful employment. I could not have been more excited when this Joint Select Committee was announced. And as you discovered from all the presenters that have been before this committee, there is a clarion call that the time is now for Maine to unite and get organized in addressing this critical issue.

The very exercise to prepare LD 90 shows why this issue has not surfaced as a top priority. The key elements of the solution are spread out among at least three standing committees (Education, Labor, Commerce, Research and Economic Development & Human Services). The skills gap is too important of an issue to our citizens and businesses not to be a front burner issue for the next ten years and beyond. I am thrilled that this committee is entertaining the option of creating a successor body to continue the important work you have started.

I would like to offer a few comments on the parts of the LD90 that impact the Maine Community College System. First, Part A of the Bill that speaks to improving transfer of academic credits between our seven community colleges and the seven universities. I am in complete support and want to thank Chancellor Page for his willingness to finally bring this long overdue issue to a close.

Second, Part B of the Bill which permanently establishes the Bring College to ME program with an annual allocation of \$320,000. The program was started in 2007 after I had visited all 16 counties and met with 160 business and community leaders throughout rural Maine. Six years ago leaders in rural communities were calling to update the work skills of their local residents, and bringing college programs to their regions would be one of the important options. The program has been in place for the last five years, and funded by grants from various foundations. We have served nearly 250 students from more than 90 rural communities enrolled in nursing, medical assisting, health information technology, paramedicine, and emergency medical services programs. The average age of the participants was 33. It has proven to be one of the most successful programs we have ever started in the System and it has led to higher graduation rates and success for students finding employment. With this new allocation of \$320,000 a year we will be able to offer four full degree programs in rural Maine, serving between 60 and 75 students every year.

Third, Part G which helps address the skills of our incumbent workforce. Seventy-eight percent of the current workforce will be working in 2020. The majority of them would benefit greatly by enhancing their skills for upward mobility and job security. Under LD 90 the Maine Community College System, through its seven college business and industry divisions, will be able to offer businesses with less than 100 employees free training and employers with over 100 employees training at 50% of the cost. With at least 95% of Maine's employers with less than 100 employees this Bill will allow us to function as their training department. The program will be coordinated by the staff of Maine Quality Centers. The MCCS has committed to match the allocation of \$125,000, which will allow us to serve 450 to 500 incumbent workers over the next biennium.

Next, Part L begins to address the backlog of students waiting to get into programs of high demand. Currently, we have 84 programs that have reached their maximum enrollment and we have students quued up waiting for the next available opening. The annual \$2M dollar investment in LD90 is the first investment we have seen in ten years to increase enrollment. With this investment we will now be able to enroll an additional 500 students in high demand programs. We are deeply appreciative of your commitment to helping us address the long lists of students waiting to enroll and to help Maine businesses find the skilled workers they so desperately need.

Finally, I would like to work with you in work session about the portion of this Bill that expands the membership of the Education Coordinating Committee. While the committee languished for years it is up and running quite well. It is the only forum where the four heads of education and our chairs meet and can have peer to peer frank discussions on policy issues and education implementation strategies. I'd like to better understand what we are gaining or losing if the committee's membership is expanded.

In closing, I have attached a list of our All Maine Academic Team, who we will honor next week at an event in Augusta. These 14 stellar students range in age from 20 to 57. The average age is 39. They are enrolled in a variety of programs including Early Childhood Education, Wind Power Technology, Medical Assisting, Communications & New Media, Occupational Therapy and Electrical & Automation Technology. I wanted to share the list with you, so you will see the faces and read the stories of the students who LD 90 will be helping. Because of your investment, over 1,100 more Maine people will be prepared for better job opportunities in Maine.

For all for us who have been on the front lines of the skills gap issue, I offer a sincere thank you. I look forward to joining you in trying to win support for LD 90. I would be glad to address any questions you may have at this time, and I will also be available for your work sessions.



Maine Community College System

The MCCS 2013 All-Maine Academic Team

Celebrating the Accomplishments of Maine's Community College Students

On Wednesday, March 27, the Maine Community College System will recognize 14 outstanding students who have been named to this year's All-Maine Academic Team. The students range in age from 20 to 57 and have been selected for their academic achievement, leadership, and service. They represent more than 18,500 students who are enrolled this year at Maine's seven community colleges. Like so many other community college students they share a strong work ethic and a determination to use their education to contribute in meaningful ways to their communities.



Michael Cloutier, Central
Maine Community College,
Auburn

Residence: Auburn
Age: 51 **GPA:** 3.97
Major: Human Services

After being out of school for 30 years, Michael Cloutier needed a place where he could start his education and continue his personal journey. A friend suggested CMCC and he is grateful for the advice. As a volunteer at a local hospital he is committed to helping others who are less fortunate. In the classroom, he leads by the power of example, sharing his experiences with others. He was recently named a Coca-Cola All-State Community College Bronze Scholar. His dream, or vision, as he calls it, includes earning a bachelor's degree in social work and pursuing a career as a substance abuse counselor working with young people.



Jennifer Woodard, Central
Maine Community College,
Auburn

Residence: Turner
Age: 39 **GPA:** 3.89
Major: Early Childhood
Education, Education

When she graduated from high school, Jennifer Woodard admits she wasn't ready for college and enrolled in the U.S. Air Force, where she served for six years. As a mother to five children and stepchildren, she wanted to show them it was never too late to follow your dreams and enrolled in college when she was 37. She is always quick to help fellow students who seek her counsel because of her life experience and enthusiasm for her chosen field. She plans to continue her education to become a primary school teacher.



Sarah Freeman, Eastern Maine Community College, Bangor
Residence: Bangor
Age: 20 **GPA:** 3.91
Major: Business Management

Having been homeschooled, Sarah Freeman was looking for a college that would help her navigate her first experience with public

education after earning her GED. Her choice was EMCC. She says the small class sizes, supportive faculty, and becoming a math and English tutor have helped her become more confident and outgoing. She is described by her instructors as self-motivated and hard working and finds inspiration in helping others succeed academically. She plans to continue her education with the career goal of becoming a financial manager.



Jonathan Torsch, Eastern Maine Community College, Bangor
Residence: Bangor
Age: 25 **GPA:** 4.00
Major: Electrical and Automation Technology

When the company he worked for closed and he was laid off, Jonathan Torsch wanted to learn a trade and gain skills he could rely on for a lifetime.

He juggles his own classes while tutoring others in the electrical and automation technology program, as well as higher level math and science courses, all while maintaining a 4.00 GPA. He plans to continue his studies in electrical engineering at the University of Maine after he graduates and looks forward to a rewarding career in a field that he finds challenging and enjoyable.



Jennie Hart, Kennebec Valley Community College, Fairfield
Residence: Pittsfield
Age: 54 **GPA:** 3.51
Major: Occupational Therapy Assistant

Jennie Hart enrolled at KVCC after being laid off from a company where she had worked for 28 years. She says the job

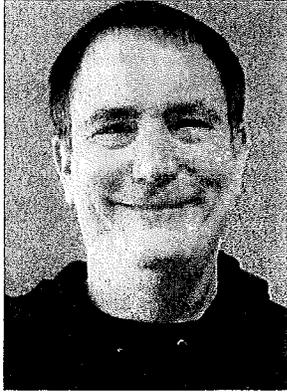
loss turned out to be a blessing in disguise, giving her the chance to pursue an education and explore her interests. The mother of three grown sons, she has volunteered her time on campus and is actively involved in the college's Phi Theta Kappa chapter activities. She plans to enter the workforce after graduating and find employment as a certified occupational therapy assistant.



Carol Lozito, Kennebec Valley Community College, Fairfield
Residence: South China
Age: 57 **GPA:** 3.78
Major: Health Information Technology

For over 20 years Carol Lozito worked in the international banking field before relocating to Maine six years ago. Enrolling in two classes a semester, she

has taken four years to complete her degree in a new field that captured her interest. Her instructors describe her as an exceptional student, who is a master in time management, a handy skill as she has worked full time as an administrative assistant while pursuing her degree. When she graduates she hopes to find employment in a hospital or doctor's office.



Karl Kornchuk,
*Northern Maine
 Community College,
 Presque Isle*
Residence: Presque Isle
Age: 52 **GPA:** 4.00
Major: Wind Power
 Technology

There are many ways to describe Karl Kornchuk. Former B-52 instructor pilot and Iraq War veteran.

Former high school math and science teacher. Or simply lifelong learner. He has earned several degrees (including a master's in aeronautical science) and is now pursuing an associate's in wind power technology. While he is enjoying being back in school, he is also relishing the role of being a teacher again, spending much of his free time tutoring other students. When he graduates he plans to work in the industry as a wind power technician or return to teaching.



Valerie White,
*Northern Maine
 Community College,
 Presque Isle*
Residence: Washburn
Age: 43 **GPA:** 3.74
Major: Accounting
 Information Systems

After 22 years in the medical field, Valerie White decided to change careers. With her degree

in medical technology, she worked her way up to becoming a laboratory director. But after relocating, she found limited options in her career field and decided to study to become a certified public accountant. At NMCC she has excelled academically while balancing a full-time course load and the demands of work outside of school. Her goal is to continue on to earn a four-year degree and then open her own business providing tax and financial advising services.



Justin Childs, *Southern
 Maine Community
 College, South Portland*
Residence: Portland
Age: 27 **GPA:** 3.60
Major: Communications
 and New Media

Money was tight when Justin graduated from high school, and he didn't think he could afford a college education. He entered the workforce and eventually

found a job with an organization that trains individuals to respond to medical emergencies around the world. He became fascinated by the potential of new media to reach different audiences, and with the encouragement of his boss, enrolled at SMCC. In spite of having to work full time while going to school, Justin is passionate about his education and more enthusiastic than ever before about his future. He hopes eventually to earn a bachelor's degree and become a marketing director.



David Spenlinhauer,
*Southern Maine Community
 College, South Portland*
Residence: Portland
Age: 36 **GPA:** 4.00
Major: Communications
 and New Media

With lots of life experience, but no formal education, David Spenlinhauer decided to enroll at SMCC to earn a college degree. Along the way he changed his outlook

on life and has earned a perfect 4.00 GPA. "It's neat to meet other like-minded and motivated people, all at different points in their lives with some pretty amazing experiences of their own," he says. He jokes he may never want to leave SMCC, but says he is ready for the right opportunity when it presents itself. He would like to continue his education when he graduates and eventually find work in feature film or television production.



Lura Jackson, *Washington County Community College, Calais*
Residence: Calais
Age: 29 **GPA:** 3.98
Major: Liberal Studies

After a 10-year break from college spent, in part, volunteering and caring for others, Lura Jackson enrolled at WCCC. Initially wary about returning to

college, she discovered that the small class sizes and supportive instructors helped spark her interest in learning and provided her with a strong sense of community. "At WCCC I rediscovered my passion for learning and a fiery desire to improve the lives of those around me," she says. She plans to continue her education to earn a bachelor's degree in humanities. And she intends to keep giving back. Her career goals are diverse and include interests in scientific research and publication, invention, and community improvement.



Christine Phillips, *Washington County Community College, Calais*
Residence: Calais
Age: 32 **GPA:** 3.93
Major: Business Management, International Commerce

As a full-time student and busy mom to three children who works three jobs, Christine Phillips says there

are days she can hardly take a breath. But she also says she enjoys every minute of it. Until the company she worked for closed, she had never found the right time or opportunity to attend college. After her job loss, she moved back to Maine with her family to enroll at WCCC to improve her future prospects. She says it was the best decision she ever made. She plans to continue her education in business management with the goal of becoming an entrepreneur. Christine has been named Maine's New Century Scholar for having the highest All-USA Community College Academic Team application score in the state.



Rebecca DeSimone, *York County Community College, Wells*
Residence: Springvale
Age: 38 **GPA:** 3.94
Major: Liberal Studies

As a single, working mother with an 11-year old daughter, Rebecca DeSimone decided to continue her college education at YCCC to improve her future financial

prospects. She quickly distinguished herself, according to her instructors, and emerged as a leader in the classroom. Rebecca earned her associate degree from YCCC in December 2012 and is currently enrolled at USM majoring in psychology. Her goal is to earn her master's degree and become a child psychologist. She says she's excited about pursuing a career that "truly resonates with me."



Diane Griffin, *York County Community College, Wells*
Residence: Wells
Age: 50 **GPA:** 4.00
Major: Medical Assisting

A personal desire to earn her degree and a practical need to be financially self-sufficient lead Diane Griffin back to college and to YCCC, where she found the college's convenient

location and financial assistance keys to her success. Described as an active learner who is "always engaged and prepared", she has found ways to balance her family life (she has four children), community volunteer work, and coursework (earning a 4.0 GPA). Diane has plans to continue her education in the allied health field.