

Good afternoon –

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Liz Oken. I am a resident of Auburn. I am here to provide testimony in support of LD 447, An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by Providing Funds to Maine's Community Colleges.

I am also a 20-year employee of the Maine Community College System, serving at Central Maine Community College as Director of Placement and Transfer Services.

To appropriate a famous line from the movie Field of Dreams -

***If you build it, they will come...***

This phrase is apt when describing the meteoric rise of the Maine Community College System to its rightful place in Maine's higher education landscape since becoming a *community college system* on July 1, 2003.

Since then, our technical programs have expanded to support the changing technical needs of our state. Our transfer degrees have been established as viable pathways to baccalaureate degrees and beyond. The vast expansion of Workforce and Professional Development initiatives have provided free training in response to the skills needed to grow Maine's economy.

Thanks in large part to past support from the legislature, we have upgraded programs, facilities, and instructional technologies.

Guess what...? *We've built it...and they've come.*

The System is on target to surpass last year's enrollment figures (currently 16,791 students) and at CMCC, our applications are up 42.8% compared to this time last year.

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It is clear that additional resources in staffing are needed to help our students complete programs, to support the future of our state. With additional navigators, tutors, peer mentors, and librarians, we can provide the academic support needed to keep pace with our student growth, for students like George, who's returned to school after 51 years to re-enter the job market. He attends math tutoring each weekday in addition to working with a tutor in math class. Additionally, he relies on support and encouragement from two academic advisors.

For students who are struggling, additional disability coordinators, mental health support, and scholarships are greatly needed. Professional development for staff to identify students with difficulties will help meet the personal needs of our most challenged students.

For our students to be real players in Maine's economy, with unprecedented low unemployment, an unsustainable situation, we need this additional funding.

***If you build it, they will come...***

Thank you for building the Maine Community College System into all it is today.

Your enthusiastic support of LD 447 will build the Maine Community College System into what we need tomorrow. Thank you.

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