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THE MAINE SENATE
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Testimony in Support of
LD 680, An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by Providing Funds to Maine's
Community Colleges
Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
March 17, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Mattie Daughtry. I serve as President of the Maine Senate and proudly represent Senate District 23, including Brunswick, Freeport, Harpswell, Pownal, Chebeague Island, and part of Yarmouth. Today, I am honored to present LD 680, "An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by Providing Funds to Maine's Community Colleges."

Maine's community colleges are one of the most effective tools we have to expand educational opportunity, strengthen our workforce, and help Mainers build successful careers. Our seven community colleges serve a diverse group of students—many of whom are balancing school with jobs, family obligations and other responsibilities. They are future nurses, teachers, mechanics, IT professionals and small business owners. Their success is Maine's success.

We know that pursuing a degree or credential of value is not always easy, particularly for students who are also caretakers, first-generation college students or those returning to school after time in the workforce. Community colleges have noted that these students need additional support to help them stay enrolled, complete their education, and transition into Maine's workforce. That is why LD 680 provides essential ongoing funding to ensure our community colleges have the resources they need to continue offering high-quality support services to students across the state.

In recent years, Maine's community colleges have seen historic enrollment increases, largely due to targeted investments like the Free Community College initiative and workforce training programs. However, we know that increased enrollment also brings increased need. More students require support to complete their education and earn a credential of value. Furthermore, MCCS has emphasized, and I agree, that these supports are essential for helping students—particularly first-generation and low-income learners—overcome barriers to completing their education.

LD 680 provides critical funding to ensure that Maine's community colleges can continue meeting the needs of our current students, who are our future workforce.

A state appropriation of **\$6 million in FY2026 and \$6.3 million in FY2027** would expand **student persistence and completion support** by:

- **Expanding academic counseling and advising services** to help students plan their educational pathways, saving them time and money and ensuring they stay on track.
- **Increasing access to tutoring services** and extending the hours of writing and math labs to provide academic support where it is most needed.

- **Enhancing food and clothing pantries** to support students struggling with basic needs.
- **Expanding childcare and financial aid for housing** to help students balance education with family responsibilities.
- **Providing emergency aid** to assist students facing unexpected financial crises that might otherwise force them to drop out.
- **Strengthening and supporting Transfer ME**, ensuring students have clear and supported pathways to continue their education in the University of Maine System or at a different Maine institution via the NEBHE Transfer Guarantee.

We have already seen the transformative impact of investments in our community college system.

- Since its launch, the Free College program has enrolled 12,625 students—surpassing the original goal of 8,000 by 158%.
- The number of students who transfer from MCCS to the University of Maine System has increased by 50%.

Programs that help students persist and succeed are critical not only for student success but also for meeting Maine’s workforce needs. At a time when employers are struggling to find trained workers in key industries, our community colleges are an essential part of the solution.

By passing LD 680, we are making a smart investment in Maine’s future. These funds will strengthen the foundation of our workforce, provide economic opportunity for thousands of Mainers and support the continued success of our community colleges.

I respectfully urge the Committee’s support for this bill, and I would be happy to answer any questions.