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To: Senator Joseph Rafferty, Representative Michael Brennan  
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

From: Becky Smith, Director of Government and Community Relations

RE: Resolve, Directing the Maine Community College System to Study Providing On-campus Housing on All Campuses

Date: December 6, 2023

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On May 22, 2023, Governor Mills signed Resolve, Chapter 17 which directed the Maine Community College System to study housing options and opportunities at our campuses with a focus on those that do not currently offer housing. This report is the culmination of that work, however our efforts to improve and expand residential opportunities throughout the Maine Community College System are ongoing.

The Maine Community College System (MCCS) is comprised of seven colleges with nine campuses across Maine. MCCS serves 19,477 students in our certificate and Associate degree programs and approximately 12,000 in our short-term workforce training programs. Approximately 5% of our degree-seeking students live in housing provided by our colleges. A full 95% of Maine residents live within a 25-mile commute of one of the MCCS campuses.

The vast majority of our students commute to and from campus and complete portions of their coursework online. However, due to our focus on healthcare and other hands-on trades, many of our programs require participation on a campus, a satellite location, or at a clinical site. While we work hard to schedule the in-person portions of classes in a way that minimizes travel to and from our campuses and training sites, it greatly benefits some of our students to be able to live near or on campus. At the time of this report, six of our seven colleges offer some level of residential life. Only one college, Kennebec Valley Community College, does not offer any housing.

It is important to note that not all of our housing is full to capacity. Some of our students, especially those in the southern part of the State, struggle to find and afford housing. The residence halls in the southern part of the State are at capacity, generally with waiting lists, and often with the need for overflow housing in local hotels. However, the further north you travel, the more apt we are to have vacant rooms for part, or all, of the year. Because of this, we continuously monitor and adapt to best maximize our existing housing and to support our students who need a place to live or want a residential college experience.

The Maine Community College Board of Trustees is the policy-making body responsible for the fiscal health of the colleges. To this end, they set a range that the individual colleges must adhere to as they set student room and board prices. The official MCCS policy states:

The Board of Trustees shall set the limits on both the amount and annual percentage increase that a college may charge for room and board. The college presidents shall have the authority to set such rates within that range. The college presidents may increase such rates within an academic year provided that such increases do not exceed the limits set by the Board of Trustees.

The current range was last set in 2022 (Appendix A) and will be reevaluated in Spring 2024. To assure regional parity in Maine’s public higher education system, the MCCS rates are established based on the rates charged at the University of Maine campus within each region.

As part of Maine’s public higher education system, we rely on state funding to ensure that our costs are low enough to assure all Maine students who would like to attend one of Maine’s Community Colleges can do so.

MCCS has also traditionally relied on general obligation bonds and private or corporate philanthropy to maintain and expand our facilities. A [report](#) submitted to the legislature on January 2, 2020 outlined the challenges and offered solutions to the aging infrastructure, including residence halls, at our colleges and those of the University of Maine System and Maine Maritime Academy. At that time, MCCS had \$99.6 million in deferred maintenance costs.

The chart below shows the housing options currently available to our students.

<b>College</b>	<b>2023 On campus beds</b>	<b>2023 Off campus beds</b>	<b>Off campus location</b>
CMCC	253	126	Mustang Hall, motel on Center Street in Auburn
EMCC	256	0	Adding 40 off campus beds in F24 at a local hotel
NMCC	101	0	NMCC allows UNE and Quinnipiac medical students to live on campus and allows certain workforce students to live on campus for short-term training.
SMCC	460 (South Portland)  90 (Brunswick)	140	Approximately 140 students live in USM’s new residence hall, Portland Commons. Previously SMCC students who could not be housed on campus were residing in local hotels.
WCCC	142	0	
YCCC	0	40	Local hotel
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,302</b>	<b>306</b>	

It is important to note that simply providing a place to sleep is not enough. Students who live in college-provided housing need to eat, places to study, transportation to shop in their local communities or travel to off-campus jobs, and social activities that are fun, inexpensive, and healthy. They also need qualified staff who can help them navigate communal living, coursework, roommates, etc. Additionally, the facilities require security and maintenance staff.

## Innovation across the system

**Central Maine Community College** is located in Auburn and has a robust campus life and strong athletic programs. CMCC has often experienced waitlists for their housing and has utilized hotels in the area for “overflow,” especially for fall semesters when the housing crunch is typically highest. This year, due in large part to the Free College Scholarship, CMCC determined that a more substantial solution was necessary. CMCC leased an entire hotel in Auburn, branded it Mustang Hall, and staffed it as they would an on-campus dorm. Additionally, they provide transportation to campus (Mustang Hall is 1.5 miles away from campus). This allowed 126 more students to take advantage of housing.



**Eastern Maine Community College** has traditional student housing which is currently at capacity. EMMC has found that rising housing costs in Bangor has increased the interest in student housing and has increased the average age of those seeking on-campus housing.

**Kennebec Valley County Community College** has traditionally served an older adult population that commuted from nearby communities. With the success of the Free College Scholarship and the decrease in affordable housing in nearby communities, the college has begun to look to replicate the success of YCCC and hopes to lease hotel rooms for students for the 2024-25 school year. There are no plans at this point to build housing on the Fairfield and Alford campuses.

**Northern Maine Community College** faced three challenges and is piloting potential solutions. First, not all NMCC housing was occupied with the typical 18-24-year olds living in communal housing with roommates. Approximately 25% of the housing was vacant. Second, some students who wanted to attend NMCC and who needed housing had children. Third, some faculty and staff members also needed housing to be able to work at the college. In an effort to address the challenges, for the 2022-2023

academic year, NMCC offered family housing for the first time. This family housing consists of eight two-bedroom apartment-style units, located in Washington Hall on the north end of campus. With a mix of students and faculty/staff, NMCC family housing is a diverse community. To qualify for this housing, a person needs to be a student taking at least 12 credit hours a semester and working towards a degree, or they must be affiliated with the college by means of contract, employment, or education.

NMCC also rents housing to approximately six students from UNE and Quinnipiac University who are participating in clinical opportunities in Aroostook County. Short term workforce training program participants may also qualify for short term housing. Generally, these students participate in the CDL training program.

**Southern Maine Community College** observed, last year, that it could fill its on-campus housing two-times over despite having 550 house slots. This level of demand persists. In the past, students at SMCC could find rental housing in communities near campus, whether in South Portland, Brunswick, or seasonal rentals in nearby beach communities. Also, at times SMCC housed students at local hotels. This is no longer the case. Through its strong partnership with the University of Southern Maine, SMCC is now housing 140 SMCC students in [Portland Hall](#), the new residence hall on USM's Portland campus. USM had capacity and we had the need. The SMCC students are grouped together, supported by SMCC residence hall staff, and are students who are considering transferring to USM at the end of their time with SMCC.

**Washington County Community College** has some unused capacity in its on-campus housing. The college has capacity for 142 students in apartment-style housing, but currently only 122 are living on campus. As the college seeks to improve campus life for the residential students, as well as strives to assist all students with food insecurity, it is dedicated to improving food offerings on campus and hopes to move to a more robust food plan during the 2024-25 academic year.

**York County Community College** is the youngest college in the system. It was envisioned as a commuter campus with a very small full-time faculty and minimal staff. Over the past 30 years, as the economy of York County changed, the needs of its students, residents, and businesses changed. In recent years, YCCC has expanded its programming, added a center in Sanford, and started to increase its faculty and staff. With a return to more normal operations as the COVID threat diminished in 2022, the college made a strategic decision to move towards a more robust campus life. This included starting an athletic program, enhancing clubs and activities, and exploring options to provide lodging to students. The "Hawk Pride" on campus is palpable.

All of this comes at a time when housing is incredibly scarce in York County. YCCC has been able to lease hotel rooms for approximately 40 students but would like to provide on-campus housing in the future. To this end, President Fischer and his staff have been working with the Town of Wells, campus neighbors and York County businesses. The college is also conducting independent analysis on what type of housing is possible and warranted.

Last spring, the college submitted an initial rezoning application to the Town of Wells. The rezoning of the property aims to enable potential future uses, including student housing and the addition of athletic fields, which are not permitted under the current zoning. Throughout the summer, multiple workshops and public hearings were held with both the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen. College administrators also engaged in conversations with many of their neighboring residents. Collaborating closely with all stakeholders, the rezoning proposal gained unanimous support from the Planning and Select Boards, paving the way for a final version to be presented to Wells residents in the November election—where it was supported by 80% to 20% margin.

The referendum does not automatically grant permission to build student housing. YCCC will need to do environmental impact studies and meet other requirements set forth by the Town of Wells.

YCCC takes its commitment to meet the needs of local businesses very seriously. Time and time again, the industries that support York county's summer tourism boom have struggled to find seasonal workers. One of the main roadblocks is a lack of affordable housing. YCCC is in discussions with local businesses with the potential to house summer workers working in York County in any new residence halls built on campus. This will allow YCCC to have housing that is utilized year-round and provide a source of revenue to help defray operating costs to the college.

## **Barriers and Considerations**

There are many considerations when deciding whether to expand housing options on any of our campuses. Two primary considerations are the duration of the need and availability of resources. Will this need continue for 10-20-50 years? Do we have the resources to provide a safe and positive residential experience? Maine Community College System is a public institution. We rely on Maine taxpayers and tuition from Maine residents (95% of our students are from Maine). We cannot, in good conscious, build housing that may sit vacant in the future.

It is our belief that any increase in housing on or near our campuses should be done in close collaboration with the State and in order to not only to provide housing for our students, but also to further the State's economic development priorities. Maine's current [Economic Development Strategy](#) has a goal of increasing the State's workforce by 75,000 workers. To do this, workers will need to move to Maine from other states and countries and move within Maine for better job opportunities. One barrier is affordable workforce housing. It may be possible to partner with businesses and the State to provide housing that serves more than just our student population. How this is accomplished depends on the local need and the resources available.

In the past, when unemployment rose, enrollment at community colleges also increased. A strong economy meant lower enrollment. This is no longer the case. The modern economy is not as linked to unemployment as in the past and neither is enrollment at MCCS colleges. Now, with a strong economy and low unemployment, our enrollment is high. This is due, in part, to the modern economy calling for a much more technically skilled workforce. While there are many open jobs in Maine, the jobs do not match the skill set of our current workforce. This is the divide MCCS seeks to shrink.

However, the strong economic picture has led to an increase in interest rates. This impacts debt-service costs for any new building on our campuses. Construction costs are also high, so any new building project's budget would be larger than those completed prior to the COVID pandemic.

As Maine grapples with an affordable housing crisis, we hope to work with your committee to assure our students have the housing resources they need.

## Appendix A

### MAINE COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM ROOM AND BOARD ANALYSIS

The MCCS last updated the top ranges of its room and board rates in April 2020. The MCCS rates, per Board of Trustees policy, are established based on the rates charged by the university campus within a region.

Of the five MCCS colleges with residence halls, all still have room to move within their existing ranges. Within one academic year the colleges may increase room and board, but the increase must not exceed more than 10% of the prior year's rates in any given year.

Room rates are based on double occupancy in rooms designed for two students. The college may offer students an option for single occupancy, but that charge will not exceed 30% of the double occupancy room rate. Board rates, except for Washington County Community College are for 19 meals per week for two semesters. The colleges may offer options, however, the per meal charge will not exceed a 15% premium over the basic plan for 19 meals. The Board rate for WCCC's modified meal plan is based on 5 meals per week for two semesters.

College	Current MCCS Charges	Current Top of MCCS Rate Ranges	Current UMS Top of Rate Ranges FY22*	Proposed MCCS Top of Rate Ranges Effective Fall 2022	Amount of Increase/ Decrease to Current Top Rate Ranges
CMCC	8,400	10,069	10,497	10,497	428
EMCC	8,530	10,972	11,666*	11,666	694
NMCC	7,818	8,750	9,010	9,010	260
SMCC	9,850	10,230	10,658*	10,658	428
WCCC	5,340	5,805	5,811	5,811	6
YCCC <sup>1</sup>	0	0	10,658*	11,190	0

Notes:

University of Maine System FY22 rates have been used. \*University of Maine Orono and University of Southern Maine rates are proposed for FY23.

CMCC's cap is set as the average rate between USM and UMF.

WCCC only has apartments. The rate is indexed to match the rate of increase at UMM.

YCCC<sup>1</sup> pilot first year housing model for room and board.