



December 1, 2021

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
c/o Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Chairman Rafferty, Chairman Brennan, and esteemed members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

On behalf of the Roux Institute at Northeastern University—a global leader in graduate education, experiential learning, and use-inspired research—I write to respond to the Committee’s request for information about student debt levels of Maine residents at postsecondary education institutions in the state.

As you know, Chapter 79 of Resolves 2021 requires that all Maine postsecondary education institutions—including members of the Maine Independent Colleges Association (MICA), of which the Roux Institute is a member—undertake a review of the level of student debt of Maine residents at their institutions and report the results to the Committee on Educational and Cultural Affairs no later than December 1, 2021. As Chapter 79 makes specific reference to a 4-year time period and requests information about subsidized Federal Direct Loan borrowing, it appears that the Committee is particularly focused on undergraduate student debt of Maine residents. This reading is also consistent with the legislature’s enactment of Chapter 103 of Resolves 2021, which reconstitutes the 2013 Commission To Study College Affordability and College Completion and is expressly focused on undergraduate student debt.

In only its second full academic year, the Roux Institute serves a current enrollment of 317 graduate-level students, including 55 students—or 17 percent—who hail from rural Maine. The Roux Institute is authorized by the state to confer post-baccalaureate certificates and graduate degrees in a range of high-tech, high-growth fields. Central to our founding vision is an unwavering commitment to help Maine residents access and afford these cutting-edge programs.

In support of this transformative vision, last year the Harold Alfond Foundation invested \$100 million to support the establishment and growth of the Roux Institute. More than \$67 million of this funding is earmarked specifically to provide student financial aid for Maine residents over the next decade. Already, 317 Maine students have received nearly \$5 million in student aid through the Alfond Scholars program, providing these learners with unparalleled access to the Roux Institute’s education, research, and experiential learning programs at a substantially-reduced cost.

As a direct result of this financial aid program, the average per student institutional grant at the Roux Institute is \$24,000, which defrays more than half the cost of tuition across all the

Institute's academic programs—and as high as 68 percent of tuition for computer science, cloud computing and bioinformatics programs. In addition, 44 percent of total student financial aid was awarded to Maine students earning less than \$35,000 per year and 81 percent went to residents earning less than \$70,000.

It is important to underscore that because the Roux Institute is only its second year of operation, most students have not yet completed their programs. Consequently, the full measure of the current cohort's financial aid and borrowing histories remains incomplete. Therefore, it is not possible for Roux Institute at this time to report fully on these metrics or to draw conclusions about or develop reaction plans to student debt levels for program graduates.

Finally, I want to make you aware that the Roux Institute's generous financial support for Maine residents is an extension of Northeastern University's broad commitment to access and affordability overall. At the university level, Northeastern provides almost \$400 million in direct student financial aid—in the form of grants, not loans—for undergraduate and graduate students annually. This record investment—an increase of 227 percent since 2006—is part of the university's ongoing imperative to make a Northeastern education available to talented students from all circumstances and backgrounds. Moving forward, Northeastern's significant, demonstrated organizational commitment to creating financial access to postsecondary education will also guide future resourcing and methods at the Roux Institute.

This level of institutional aid has allowed Northeastern to dramatically reduce the average loan debt of its graduates. Between 2008 and 2019—the last year for which data is available—average student debt of Northeastern graduates decreased by 51 percent. Northeastern is one of fewer than 80 universities nationally that meets 100 percent of demonstrated financial need for undergraduate students. The university has also instituted a “no loan” policy for eligible Pell Grant recipients and limits its financial aid packaging to the allowable maximum amounts for Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loans.

I hope this information is helpful and responsive to the spirit of the Committee's request. All of us at the Roux Institute look forward to working together with you in the months and years ahead to help grow the state's innovation economy, strengthen the talent pipeline, and ensure that Mainers continue to have access to affordable, world-class postsecondary educational opportunities right here in Maine.

Sincerely,

Chris Mallett

Chris Mallett
Chief Administrative Officer