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Resolve, To Establish the Commission To Study College Affordability and College Completion

Emergency preamble. Whereas, acts and resolves of the Legislature do not become effective until 90 days after adjournment unless enacted as emergencies; and

Whereas, this legislation needs to take effect before the expiration of the 90-day period in order to allow the commission established in this resolve sufficient time to complete its work; and

Whereas, in the judgment of the Legislature, these facts create an emergency within the meaning of the Constitution of Maine and require the following legislation as immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety; now, therefore, be it

Sec. 1 Commission established. Resolved: That, notwithstanding Joint Rule 353, the Commission To Study College Affordability and College Completion, referred to in this resolve as "the commission," is established; and be it further

Sec. 2 Commission membership. Resolved: That the commission consists of 13 members as follows:

1. The President of the Senate shall appoint:

A. Two members of the Senate who serve on the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, including one member of the party holding the highest and one member of the party holding the 2nd highest number of seats in the Legislature;

B. One person representing a statewide association of independent higher education institutions; and

C. One person representing a statewide association of student financial aid directors;

2. The Speaker of the House shall appoint:

A. Three members of the House of Representatives who serve on the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, including 2 members of the party holding the highest and one member of the party holding the 2nd highest number of seats in the Legislature;

B. One person with expertise in higher education policy issues representing a nonprofit entity in the State that provides financial assistance to students or to high schools to assist students for college enrollment; and

C. One person with expertise in higher education policy issues representing a statewide education policy research institute; and

3. Four members of the publicly supported higher education systems in the State, including:

A. The Chancellor of the University of Maine System or the chancellor's designee;

B. The President of the Maine Community College System or the president's designee;

C. The President of the Maine Maritime Academy or the president's designee; and

D. The Chief Executive Officer of the Finance Authority of Maine or the chief executive officer's designee; and be it further

Sec. 3 Chairs. Resolved: That the first-named Senate member is the Senate chair and the first-named House of Representatives member is the House chair of the commission; and be it further

Sec. 4 Appointments; convening of commission. Resolved: That all appointments must be made no later than 30 days following the effective date of this resolve. The appointing authorities shall notify the Executive Director of the Legislative Council once all appointments have been completed. Within 15 days after appointment of all members, the chairs shall call and convene the first meeting of the commission, which must be no later than 30 days following the appointment of all members; and be it further

Sec. 5 Duties. Resolved: That the commission shall examine and make recommendations on the development of strategies to keep the cost of public postsecondary education in the State affordable and to increase the graduation rate of students enrolled in state-supported public institutions of higher education. The strategies and related cost issues to be reviewed include:

1. Oregon's "Pay Forward, Pay Back" pilot project's model of funding public postsecondary education, under which a student enrolled in a public institution of higher education, in lieu of paying tuition or fees, contracts to pay to the State a certain percentage of the student's annual income upon graduation for a specified number of years;

2. Increased funding to the State of Maine Grant Program established in the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A, section 11612 that boosts the minimum grant from \$1,000 to \$1,500 for eligible Maine residents;

3. The initiatives proposed by the public and independent colleges and universities in the State as part of the March 2014 "Improving College Affordability and Completion in Maine" report submitted to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs;

4. The extent to which Maine's public institutions of higher education support the state reforms included in the October 2013 "The Game Changers" report prepared by Complete College America, which recommends implementing the following strategies to enable more college students to complete degree programs and certificate programs and graduate from college: Performance Funding; Corequisite Remediation; Full-Time is 15; Structured Schedules; and Guided Pathways to Success;

5. The mandatory fees charged to students beyond the price of tuition charges, including technology and laboratory fees;

6. The affordability of college textbooks, including consideration of the costs and benefits of open source textbooks, for college students in the State; and

7. Other strategies that a majority of the commission members agree to include in this review.

The commission shall review previous reports prepared and submitted to the Legislature on college affordability and the rate of college degree completion in the State, including the "Statewide Education and Workforce Development Strategic Plan" report submitted by the Education Coordination Committee to the Joint Select Committee on Maine's Workforce and Economic Future on January 30, 2014; and be it further

Sec. 6 Staffing assistance; information. Resolved: That the University of Maine System, the Maine Community College System and the Maine Maritime Academy shall provide staffing assistance to the commission. The Finance Authority of Maine shall provide the commission with access to any nonconfidential aggregate information in its student financial assistance database for postsecondary education students in the State necessary to carry out the duties pursuant to section 5. The Office of Policy and Legal Analysis shall provide drafting assistance to the commission; and be it further

Sec. 7 Report; recommendations. Resolved: That the commission shall submit a report containing its findings and recommendations pursuant to section 5, including any necessary implementing legislation, to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education matters by December 9, 2014. The joint standing committee may submit a bill related to this report to the First Regular Session of the 127th Legislature.

Emergency clause. In view of the emergency cited in the preamble, this legislation takes effect when approved.

SUMMARY

This resolve is reported out by the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs pursuant to Joint Order 2013, S.P. 721. The resolve establishes the Commission To Study College Affordability and College Completion. The commission is directed to examine and make recommendations on the development of strategies to keep the cost of public postsecondary education in the State affordable and to increase the graduation rate of students enrolled in state-supported public institutions of higher education.

The commission is required to submit a report by December 9, 2014 to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education matters. The report submitted by the commission must include findings, recommendations and any necessary implementing legislation to keep the cost of public postsecondary education in the State affordable and to increase the graduation rate of students enrolled in state-supported public institutions of higher education. The joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education and cultural affairs may submit a bill related to this report to the First Regular Session of the 127th Legislature.