

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and other members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Lydia Savage (she, her, hers) and I am Professor of Geography at the University of Southern Maine and I am here to testify in support of LD 512, *An Act to Promote Student Enrollment and Degree Completion in the University of Maine System by Providing Tuition Waivers to Eligible Students*. I also support the continued funding of the free community college program. I believe that our goal should be to make sure we are helping all students achieve their goals and for some students the four-year institution is a better fit for their life and career goals.

I speak in support of this legislation as a first-generation college student who attended a community college in California and transferred to UC Berkeley. I chose a community college based on costs and received an excellent education. However, transferring into a 4-year institution in my junior year left me at a disadvantage in many ways. As a student who knew they wanted to attend a 4-year institution, I felt like I was playing catch up in many ways. I learned of opportunities too late in my college career at Cal to take advantage of them. I had no connection to faculty and students in my major or at the university - other juniors were already at work in faculty labs, classrooms and studies and in the community. Students who had spent their first two years at Cal already had established relationships with faculty mentors and other students and had established networks with internships and future employers.

I think the impact on Maine students who want to go directly to a 4-year institution of public higher education would be amazing by opening up opportunities and translating into a less expensive education overall and keep them on track for degree completion in a timely manner. Not all students would opt for this path and many will find a community college education to be their best path either to earn an associate degree or to earn a degree and transfer to a 4-year institution. This bill also proposes a degree completion component - we have many students within a year of graduation who have had to leave for multiple reasons - particularly with the challenges brought about by COVID-19 - that would be supported to degree completion by this bill.

This bill proposes a comparable path for the University of Maine System that students at our community colleges have access to and while I am focused on the benefit for the students based on my experience, this proposal would benefit the state of Maine. For those students who opt for a UMS campus, I think the investment to cover 50% of the tuition costs (after accounting for financial aid available) would pay off for the state of Maine by enhancing the human and social capital of the state in every area - theater, science, technology, art, engineering, education, etc. The economy of Maine would benefit by employers viewing Maine as a state investing in higher education and choosing to remain here or locate or expand here.

Thank you for your time.