



TO: Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
FROM: Tyler Stoldt, Dean of Enrollment Management and Student Services
RE: Testimony in support of LD 447, An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by
Providing Funds to Maine's Community Colleges
DATE: March 6, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. I am Tyler Stoldt, the Dean of Enrollment Management and Student Services at Washington County Community College in Calais. I am providing testimony in support of LD 447, An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by Providing Funds to Maine's Community Colleges.

I grew up in a small rural town in the Midwest and was the first in my family to attend college. I was fortunate to receive Federal Pell grants and other scholarships to help me be able to afford community college. Without that financial support and assistance from various academic advisors and navigators that helped me understand the process, I truly believe I would not have completed my associate degree that was the foundation for the remainder of my education.

The pandemic severely disrupted the education of all students and led to gaps in classroom learning. We see evidence of this everyday as students meet with our staff, they are underprepared for the transition to life as a college student. With this as our reality, we are striving to provide increasing supports to our incoming students at WCCC that are focused on student success and retention.

With the return to more in-person learning, we have also seen an increase this academic year in the number of students accessing our food pantry. We have seen a 243% increase in usage of our pantry this year compared to the same time last year. We have already surpassed the number of visits now, with months left to go in the semester, compared to the entire last academic year.

Over eighty percent of our incoming students this academic year have low enough incomes to qualify for Federal Pell grants. Of those students, over thirty percent are the primary financial support for children in their household. Inflation and the high cost at the grocery store and the cost of heating homes, has left many students strapped this year. With this being the case, incoming students have struggled to afford the required materials needed to be successful in their courses. We have worked diligently to meet this need and to connect students to internal and external resources for assistance, whenever possible. Additional financial support is needed to help ensure incoming students have what they need to put their best foot forward in their chosen programs of study.

Thank you for your consideration of An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by Providing Funds to Maine's Community Colleges.