

James Laverdiere

LD 512: An Act to Promote Student Enrollment and Degree Completion in the University of Maine System by Providing Tuition Waivers to Eligible Students

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is James Laverdiere and I am a resident of South Portland who is writing with some concerns with LD 512 as it is currently written.

I am a parent of a 2022 high school graduate who is currently attending the University of Maine in the Computer Engineering program and I feel like this bill is leaving him behind. My son could have attended the community college for free under the Maine Free College Scholarship program but instead opted to go the University of Maine for the 22-23 academic year. We are a middle class family from southern Maine and are paying full tuition and fees along with room and board. You may wonder why we made the choice to go into debt to attend the University of Maine when the Community College would have been free? The answer is simple, while there are many programs at the Community College that seamlessly transfer to the University as a 2 plus 2, that is not true of all programs. If my son would have taken the two-year pre-engineering program through the community college system and then transferred, he still would have had to attend the University for another 3 years to obtain his bachelor's degree in computer engineering. He would have been on a 5 year enrollment plan as opposed to the traditional 4 years.

While I agree that something should be done to help alleviate the costs of tuition and fees at the University to attract new students to higher education, I disagree with how this bill is written in that it has left students like my son to fend for themselves and does nothing to help retain students like him. It was my understanding when the original Maine Free College Scholarship program was introduced, it was targeted at those students and families who were most impacted by the pandemic. The class of 2022 was included in the Maine Free College Scholarship program intentionally and shouldn't be excluded now from tuition assistance at the University. We need to do more to make college affordable for all Maine students and I hope that if this bill passes, that it would be amended to include the same graduating classes that were included in the Free Community College bill regardless of the fact they made the decision to enroll at the University the fall of 2022.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

James Laverdiere

South Portland