

Lisa Knedler
Durham, ME/MSAD 15
LD 210

Testimony for Free Community College

An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds

for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary

to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30,

2026 and June 30, 2027 (A-132 through A-134 and language EEEE)

Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

February 7, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Senator Rafferty, Representative Gattine, Representative Murphy, and Members of the

Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Lisa Knedler, and I am from Durham, Maine. I write to testify in support of the portion of LD210 that funds the Maine Free College Program and general operating costs at the Maine Community College System.

By way of introduction, I have been an educator in Maine for over 25 years at the middle and high school levels as well as in adult education in conjunction with Southern Maine Community College. I currently teach a concurrent enrollment class through the University of Maine. I coordinate advisory programs for Gray-New Gloucester Middle and High Schools where there is a focus on life and career readiness as outlined by the Maine Learning Results. I also coordinate the International Baccalaureate program for MSAD 15. Additionally, I have direct experience with Free Community College as my son recently completed an Electrical Engineering Technology associate's degree at SMCC and aspires to be a master electrician.

I am a huge advocate of the Maine Community College System as it provides an approachable entry point to college for all Mainers. This entry point leads to students having the confidence to pursue additional education/degrees without the burden of debt of a four-year college. Maine's community colleges train eager residents for technical fields that are in dire need of specifically skilled workers. The 200% time to complete degrees allows students to work and achieve their degree while supporting themselves. The benefit of an educated and well-trained workforce has a positive impact on the economy of Maine that far outweighs the cost of this program.

In my role as MSAD 15, I have the opportunity to promote the benefits of community college especially with students who don't have a defined path after high school graduation. Often these students are reluctant to continue their education for a variety of reasons. By removing the financial hardship associated with higher education, especially for those without the means to pay for school, the State of Maine opened the door to life changing educational experiences that lead to good paying jobs and relevant careers. I have seen an increase in students who dream of a 4-year degree but can't commit to or aren't quite ready for a four-year college experience. Free community college allows them to start their education without the burden, commitment, and pressures of a bachelor's program. Our community colleges build the skills necessary to launch students into higher degrees or directly into the workforce. Everyone in the state collectively benefits from a well-educated, well-trained workforce. When our students know that they can make a living here in the state, they stay and make our state a better place to live. Please support this bill for the future of the State of Maine.