

Testimony from Deianira Christner

Poland, ME

Academic Advisor at Central Maine Community College

In Support of L.D. 210

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 Deianira Christner. My hometown is Poland Maine and I am an Academic Advisor at Central Maine Community College. I am here to testify in support of the portion of LD210 that funds the Maine Free College Program and general operating costs.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I come before you in two capacities: as an employee of Central Maine Community College and as a parent of a student who has directly benefited from the Maine Free College Scholarship Program.

In my role as an academic advisor at the college, I have the privilege of interacting with students on a daily basis, both those attending as part of the free college scholarship and those who are paying out of pocket. I witness firsthand how empowering it is for traditional and non-traditional students alike to have access to higher education. As an advisor, I assist students with career exploration, course selection, scheduling and sometimes just navigating the challenges of balancing school, work, and life. For many of our students, having access to college isn't just a path to personal growth; it's a doorway to a future they might not have otherwise had the chance to experience.

As a parent, I can attest to the profound impact this opportunity has had on my own family. My son, who graduated from Poland Regional High School in 2023, has been able to pursue a college education through the free college scholarship program. Initially, unsure of his career path, he enrolled at Central Maine Community College in the Business program. However, through the guidance and opportunities offered at the college, he found his passion in the Precision Machining program. He will be graduating this Spring with his Associates degree in Precision Machining and has already secured a job in the field.

This opportunity has not only provided him with the skills needed to enter the workforce, but it has also given him a sense of independence and confidence. He is able to earn and save his own money, which has allowed him to step into adulthood with a sense of financial freedom. Additionally, this experience ignited a desire to further his education and he has been accepted into the College of Engineering and Computing at the University of Maine in Orno, where he will continue his education and pursue a Bachelors degree in Mechanical Engineering.

My son, along with his friends and fellow students, have been able to make college a reality thanks to the free college scholarship program. I have another son who will be graduating from high school in 2027 and hope that he will have the chance to be a part of this program as well. I believe this program is a life-changing opportunity for many Maine residents, and I strongly support making it a permanent option for all students in Maine. Not only does it transform individual lives but it also strengthens our communities by empowering the next generation of skilled workers and professionals.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you will continue to support initiatives like the free college scholarship program, ensuring that more students can have access to higher education and the brighter futures it provides.

Sincerely,

Deianira Christner

Academic Advisor, Central Maine Community College

Parent of a Central Maine Community College Student