

Jordyn Balicki

LD210 Testimony

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 Jordyn Balicki, I am from Jonesport and I am currently enrolled as a nursing student at Eastern 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 at the Maine Community College System. To say that free college has changed my life is an understatement. Attending community college for nursing was something I had never even considered. I had planned on attending a four year college, had given my deposit, and was prepared to pay a loan for most of my life. As a student that doesn't receive financial aid when the free college initiative was announced it was a game changer. There was only one thing that gave me pause about switching, there is a stigma associated with going to community college. I feared that I would be seen as lesser for going to a community college, but looking back now I would choose this route every time. I have become one of the biggest and loudest advocates for community college. I have spoken to students on countless occasions on the benefits of choosing this path, and my biggest selling point was that you will get a high quality education for free. The financial burden of college can be the deterring factor for many students wanting to start their educational journey. I come from a small fishing town where the options are to fish, enter a trade, or move away to pursue another career. Trade programs allow students to enter the workforce immediately after graduation, and keep the small towns in Maine running. Keeping education free will continue to allow students to pursue an education without the stress of finances, and continue to build the workforce in Maine for these essential careers.

Another selling point of community college is the typical campus size and experience offered. Experience you gain at a community college is hands on, and career driven. I have had the opportunity to be involved with Residence Life, and grow my leadership skills, something I would not have considered had I attended a University. Along with the opportunities for growth the staff at community colleges strive for your success. They take the time to learn your story, understand your situation, but most importantly know your name. The student and staff connections that can be found at a community college are unmatched comparatively to a four year college. Continuing to offer free college will allow students to get help that is catered to their needs and completely personalized to them.

But why do I stand before you today? I am here for the future of community colleges, for my friends, my family, and my future coworkers that are beginning their educational journey. I am here so those people may go to college without the fear of how they were going to pay for it. I am here for the students like me from a middle class family with two working parents who do not receive financial aid, for the hands-on learners, for those who truly value a community, and for those that will contribute to the state of Maine in their future careers, that is why I am here and in support of Maine free college. Thank you for your time.