

Testimony from Dr. Tyler Stoldt
Calais
Dean of Enrollment Management & Student Services at Washington County Community College

In Support of L.D. 680
An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by Providing Funds to Maine's Community Colleges

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

March 17, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Dr. Tyler Stoldt, and I serve as the Dean of Enrollment Management and Student Services at Washington County Community College in Calais. I am honored to provide testimony today in strong support of LD 680, An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by Providing Funds to Maine's Community Colleges.

I understand firsthand the profound impact that community colleges have on students' lives because I was one of those students. Growing up in a small, rural Midwestern town, I was the first in my family to pursue higher education. Without federal Pell grants and scholarship support, attending college would have been impossible for me. Equally important was the personal guidance from academic advisors who helped me navigate college. Without this holistic support, I would not have completed my associate degree, which laid the foundation for my career and future educational achievements.

Today, at Washington County Community College, we witness daily the ongoing effects of educational disruption caused by the pandemic. Many incoming students struggle academically, emotionally, and financially, arriving underprepared for the transition to college life. To overcome these challenges, we have expanded retention-focused programs and strengthened student support services to guide students successfully through their academic journeys.

Financial insecurity among our students is more pronounced now than ever before. Our campus food pantry continues to see increased usage compared to previous years and over 80% of our incoming students qualify for federal Pell grants, highlighting their significant financial need. Additionally, over 30% of these students are primary providers for their families, balancing responsibilities as parents, caregivers, and students.

Inflation and escalating costs for groceries, heating, and housing exacerbate our students' struggles. Many find it challenging to afford essential materials for their courses, creating

significant barriers to academic success. While our staff works tirelessly to connect students with resources, additional financial support is urgently needed.

Funds from LD 680 would directly support critical areas at Washington County Community College to support student success and retention. The bill would enable expanded mental health support, an area highlighted as critical by my recent dissertation research, which emphasized the urgent need for visible, accessible, and confidential mental health services to address students' heightened anxiety, depression, and isolation—significantly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, these funds would provide students with increased access to essential academic resources, reducing barriers to course completion and improving overall academic preparedness.

Investing in LD 680 is an investment in our students, our community, and our state. This funding will enhance vital support systems, contributing directly to improved retention rates, academic success, and workforce readiness for our students.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of LD 680 and your continued commitment to supporting student success and retention at Maine's community colleges.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tyler Stoldt', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tyler Stoldt, Ed.D.

Dean of Enrollment Management & Student Services
Washington County Community College