

TO: Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

FROM: Elizabeth Oken, Director of Placement and Transfer Services,
Central Maine Community College

RE: Testimony in support of LD 680, An Act to Support Higher Education in
Maine by Providing Funds to Maine's Community Colleges

DATE: March 17, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Liz Oken, I live in Auburn, and I am Director of Placement and Transfer Services at Central Maine Community College, where I have been employed for almost 23 years. I am providing testimony in support of LD 680, An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by Providing Funds to Maine's Community Colleges.

To appropriate a famous line from the movie Field of Dreams -

If you build it, they will come...

This phrase is apt when describing the meteoric rise of the Maine Community College System to its rightful place in Maine's higher education landscape since becoming a *community college system* on July 1, 2003.

Since then, our technical programs have expanded to support the changing technical needs of our state. Our transfer degrees have been established as viable pathways to baccalaureate degrees and beyond. The vast expansion of Workforce and Professional Development initiatives have provided free training in response to the skills needed to grow Maine's economy.

Thanks in large part to past support from the legislature, we have upgraded programs, facilities, and instructional technologies.

Elizabeth (Liz) Oken
Director of Placement and Transfer Services
Central Maine Community College, Auburn, ME
(207) 755-5239 or eoken@mainecc.edu
March 17, 2025

Guess what...? *We've built it...and they've come.*

Continued enrollment in degree programs, thanks to the Free College initiative, and an infusion of grant funds for workforce credentials, have kept our classrooms, labs, and shops robust with a growing population of learners.

It is evident that *additional* resources in staffing are needed to help our students complete programs to benefit the future of our state. With more advisors, tutors, peer mentors, and librarians, we can provide the academic support required to keep pace with our unprecedented student growth.

- For students who have weathered the pandemic, it is an ever-changing landscape to provide support that meets their needs, so they become vibrant contributors to Maine's growth and prosperity.
- For students who are struggling – with a disability, with their mental health, with their finances – bolstered services and scholarships are a necessity, so they exceed their potential, contributing their talents to our economy.
- For faculty and staff who serve our students and our State, professional development and an increase in our ranks will retain these talented, dedicated professionals and enable them to better serve current and future students.

Our community colleges are an economic engine in Maine, ever responsive to employer needs and the overall financial health of our state and its people. Additional funding will allow the MCCC to continue in this vital role.

If you build it, they will come...

Thank you for building the Maine Community College System into all it is *today*.

Your enthusiastic support of LD 680 will transform the Maine Community College System into what we need *tomorrow*.

Thank you for your consideration and your support.

Elizabeth (Liz) Oken
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