

In SUPPORT of *LD 700, An Act to Promote Student Enrollment and Degree Completion in the University of Maine System by Awarding Waivers of Tuition and Fees to Eligible Students*.

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and other members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Lydia Savage and I am a professor at the University of Southern Maine and President of the Associated Faculties of the Universities of Maine representing all fulltime faculty across the state. I offer this testimony today on behalf of the MEA in SUPPORT of *LD 700, An Act to Promote Student Enrollment and Degree Completion in the University of Maine System by Awarding Waivers of Tuition and Fees to Eligible Students*.

The Governor and Legislature have been pro-active and forward thinking in their approach to the Community College System. For several years now, the state has funded the free community college program, and we unequivocally support this program and the continued funding of the free community college program. I believe that our goal should be to make sure we are helping all students achieve their goals and for some students the four-year institution is a better fit for their life and career goals.

I speak in support of LD 700 as a first-generation college student who attended a community college in California and transferred to UC Berkeley. I chose a community college based on costs and received an excellent education. However, transferring into a 4-year institution in my junior year left me at a disadvantage in many ways. As a student who knew they wanted to attain a 4-year institution, I felt like I was playing catch up in many ways. I learned of opportunities too late in my college career at Cal to take advantage of them. I had no connection to faculty and students in my major or at the university - other juniors were already at work in faculty labs, classrooms and studies and in the community. Students who had spent their first two years at Cal already had established relationships with faculty mentors and other students and had established networks with internships and future employers.

I think the impact on Maine students who want to go directly to a 4-year institution of public higher education would be life-changing for students by opening up opportunities and translating into a less expensive education overall and keep them on track for degree completion in a timely manner. Not all students would opt for this path and many will find a community college education to be their best path either to earn an associate degree or to earn a degree and transfer to a 4-year institution.

This bill proposes a comparable path for the University of Maine System that students at our community colleges have access to and while I am focused on the benefit for the

students based on my experience and the experiences of my students, this proposal would benefit the state of Maine. For those students who opt for a UMS campus, I think the investment to close the gap between tuition and Pell grants would pay off for the state of Maine by enhancing the human and social capital of the state in every area - theater, science, technology, art, engineering, education, etc. The economy of Maine would benefit by employers viewing Maine as a state investing in higher education and choosing to remain here or locate or expand here.

Thank you for your time.

Lydia Savage  
Portland, Maine