

Lina Martinez Nocito
Farmington, ME
March 17, 2025

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

My name is Lina Martinez Nocito, and I am a sophomore at the University of Maine at Farmington (UMF) and a legislative organizer with Maine Youth Power, a rural, youth-led movement fighting for human dignity, equity, and a livable future for all. I'm writing today to express my strong support for LD 700.

This bill would significantly increase the University of Maine System's ability to make a postsecondary education attainable for all Mainers. It's no secret that Maine has serious problems with "brain drain," or the tendency of young people to move out of the state for college and pursue careers elsewhere. Offering a truly affordable in-state option for Pell Grant-eligible students would encourage talented Mainers to stay in our state during their college years and beyond.

Given how exorbitantly expensive college has gotten in the past few decades, state schools are often the most accessible, affordable avenue available to prospective students for getting a quality education. And they're effective: for instance, US News, which develops some of the most widely known and respected college rankings in the country, ranks UMF an impressive fifth for social mobility and eighth for overall best value among all schools in the northern United States (a category they extend from Maine to Maryland).¹

However, despite the commendable efforts the University of Maine System makes to ensure that enrollment is as affordable as possible, most students still graduate with significant amounts of debt—and that can have a huge impact on our lives long after we graduate. This is especially relevant when discussing schools such as UMF, where the vast majority of students don't come from financially privileged backgrounds. A full 97% of full-time, degree-seeking UMF students receive financial aid.² Many of us are putting ourselves through college, and the majority work during the school year, some of us as much as thirty or even forty hours a week while managing a full course load.

According to US News, 42% of students enrolled at UMF receive Pell Grants, and the numbers are similar among other Maine state universities.³ Thus, the passage of LD 700 would have an overwhelmingly positive effect on a huge portion of Maine's hardworking students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lina Martinez Nocito

¹ <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/university-of-maine-at-farmington-2040/overall-rankings>

² <https://www.umf.maine.edu/about/umf-facts/>

³ <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/university-of-maine-at-farmington-2040/student-life>