

Hugh Willard
Central Maine Community College
LD 2212

Members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Legislative Committee:
My name is Hugh Willard, and I am the Director of Counseling at Central Maine Community College (CMCC). I am also a very recent and happy Maine transplant coming from North Carolina. I taught English at a community college while in North Carolina and saw firsthand the impact of students not being able to afford college tuition. For veterans using the GI Bill, this was not an issue. For others, it was often the mitigating factor that had them stretching their college experience out over many years. Quite a few of these students fell short of their educational goals altogether due to the demands of work and family. Time and attrition are merciless taskmasters. Coming to Maine and CMCC, I have sat with many students who describe the constant experience of running out of heating oil, of needing to be creative with finding safe and appropriate housing because of their parents' physical or mental illness, or substance abuse. Several of these students have navigated securing their own health insurance coverage through MaineCare. In hearing their stories, I take great comfort in knowing they are resilient and determined to keep pushing through obstacles. They are committed to a better future for themselves. For each of these students, the security of knowing that their great state of Maine will continue to walk beside them in their educational pursuits is beyond substantial. It's the difference between two very different futures. I appreciate your careful consideration of extending free tuition to our college students.