



## **MAINE COUNSELING ASSOCIATION**

*A State Branch of the American Counseling Association*

February 16, 2026

### **Testimony in Support of Making Permanent the Maine Free College (MFC) Scholarship Program**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and distinguished members of the joint standing committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, my name is Stan Pelletier, I am a certified school counselor with over 25 years experience working in Maine schools and communities. I am also the Public Policy chair of the Maine Counseling Association. It is in this capacity that I would like to support the continuation of the Maine Free College (MFC) Scholarship program, which has for the past five years provided free tuition support to Maine high school graduates seeking to continue their education at a Maine Community College.

One element of the work of high school counselors in Maine is to assist and guide students in developing a personalized post-secondary pathway to success, whether that be in the military, a traditional four-year college, or a community college program. I can say without a doubt that the MFC program has made a tremendous difference in the lives of many Maine students graduating from high school. I have, on repeated occasions, had a conversation with a student that goes something like this: I never thought I could go to college. Where do I sign up? This program has helped to raise the aspirations of Maine graduates, young people who often want to stay in Maine, raise a family, and earn a living wage. It helps them to see a way forward where they may not have, and learn the skills necessary in a one or two year certificate or associates program to practice many trades essential to our state economy and collective well-being. Other students have used this program to make a planned four-year college journey in Maine more affordable, attending a Maine Community College for two years before an articulation agreement between our Community Colleges and State Universities allows for easy transition to complete a bachelor's degree.

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This program is not a handout, it is a thoughtful investment in the future of our economy and the quality of life of Maine citizens and families to come. Common-sense accountability measures (incentives to perform to a high standard and complete a program) may be incorporated into this program to prevent abuse or dead-end debt to taxpayers; recipients do and will have “skin in the game” with respect to fees and expenses not covered by the program.

The conversations I have had with students and former students have been reflected back to me by colleagues from around the state. This program is a success, and can continue to be a part of the solution toward workforce development and ongoing ability of young Mainers to serve in good quality, living-wage jobs here in our state, where many of them want to be. Please feel free to contact me or any of the Executive Board members of the Maine Counseling Association if you have any questions. Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully submitted,

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