

**Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs  
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs**

**Testimony in support of the Maine Community College System's portion of LD 2212, An Act Making Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027. Part A, page 17 and Language QQQ**

**February 20, 2026**

Senator Rotundo, Senator Rafferty, Representative Gattine, Representative Murphy, and Members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Erika Hanks. My hometown is Jackson, Maine and I am a 2nd year Digital Graphic Design Student at Eastern Maine Community College. I am writing to testify in support of the portion of LD 2212 that funds and makes permanent the Maine Free College Scholarship. I want to start this with a thank you to those who implemented this program and gave me this opportunity. Now in the following pages, I will explain why this program needs to stay implemented and how it will help Maine as a whole.

I grew up in a small trailer on the outskirts of Jackson Maine, population of 615. I attended Mount View High school, a small school sandwiched between two cow farms overlooking a corn field. I grew up around 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> generation farmers who already had their lives laid out for them. Those not fortunate enough to be born into a family business would work while attending high school, constantly prodded by their family to join the workforce and help with the bills. Something many people don't talk about in Waldo County is the struggle to get by.

My father dropped out of high school his junior year. My mother completed high school but dropped out of college. They couldn't afford to go to school and raise children. It wasn't until I was around 12 that my parents were able to secure steady and well-paying jobs. My parents were ecstatic, stability was their goal for years, and it took them 16 years to achieve it. I noticed

a shift in the conversations about my future. My parents were insistent that my sister and I attend college. They spoke of the struggles they faced without degrees and how we needed to make better choices than they did. This seems ideal doesn't it? Parents supporting their children's education. Unfortunately, this route isn't as easy as it seems for those living in poverty.

If I were to go to college, I would need to fund it myself. My parents had money, but they often spent it on things that weren't necessary such as 4-wheelers, or new cars. Their irresponsibility with money is what first led to me not wanting to attend college. I was fearful of collecting debt the same way my parents did. I got a job once I was able, but even with as much as I worked, I was never able to collect a college fund. All my money went to supporting my family, even though I hid most of my earnings. It wasn't until the state of Maine released that students could attend community college for free that I was able to think of myself attending college.

Not only did this change effect the way I thought about my future, but I was able to see a change in my peers as well. Those who were driven to think high school was useless because they were going to go straight to working anyway decided they wanted to pursue other things. My classmate's GPA rose. They became more involved during college fairs. I even saw more of my peers attending the technical center with me. All of these things happened because the students who felt they never had enough money to succeed were given a chance to further themselves without needing money.