

Testimony from Amelia Drake
Houlton
Current Student at Washington County Community College

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

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

February 24, 2026

Senator Rotundo, Senator Rafferty, Representative Gattine, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Amelia Drake. I am from Houlton, Maine, and I am currently a student in the Automotive Program at Washington County Community College. I am here to testify in support of continuing the Maine Free College program.

I began my journey in the skilled trades through Career and Technical Education in Houlton. My experience in CTE gave me hands-on exposure to automotive work and helped me see that the trades were not only a possibility for me, but a pathway where I could succeed. As a female student entering a traditionally male-dominated field, that experience was important. It showed me that I belonged in the shop, that my skills mattered, and that I could build a career in this industry.

If Free College had not been an option for me, I do not believe I would have attended college at all. The cost of tuition would have been a barrier that I could not overcome. Instead of focusing on school, I likely would have been working full time or trying to balance part-time work while attempting to study.

Because of Free College, I have been able to focus on my education and my mental health. Rather than worrying about how I would pay for school or how many hours I needed to work, I have been able to dedicate my time and energy to my studies. That has made a real difference in my success and in my confidence.

Free College has provided me with the first steps toward gaining an education that I once believed was out of reach. It has pushed me out of my comfort zone and into courses that are preparing me for a strong future. Through my experience in the Automotive Program, I have discovered that I want to continue my education and return for Mechanical Technology. Without this opportunity, I may never have realized my full potential.

When Free College became available, I had choices about where to go, but the Automotive Program at Washington County Community College stood out to me. It offered the hands-on learning and career-focused training that fit my goals. Free College made it possible for me to choose education rather than walk away from it.

As a woman in the trades, having access to education and support through Free College has been especially meaningful. It has reinforced that these careers are open to everyone who is willing to work hard and learn. Programs like this help broaden access and strengthen Maine's workforce by supporting students from all backgrounds.

Free College has made education obtainable for me. It has helped me achieve goals that once felt out of reach and has set me on a path toward a meaningful career in Maine.

I respectfully ask you to continue supporting the Maine Free College program so that other students can have the same opportunity that I have had.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amelia Drake".

Amelia Drake

Automotive Program Student

Washington County Community College