

Testimony from Bode Kunas
Auburn
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 Bode Kunas and I am a student in the Electrical program at Washington County Community College. I am here to testify in support of continuing the Maine Free College program.

In high school, I was told what many students are told, that a four-year college was the only real option. It felt like earning a bachelor's degree was the expected path, even if it was not the right fit for everyone. I did not know much about skilled trades as a serious and respected career pathway until I had a conversation with my grandfather's brother, who was an electrician and later became an electrical instructor at Kennebec Valley Community College. He encouraged me to look into trades like welding, plumbing, and electrical work. That conversation changed everything for me.

During a career day at my high school, I learned more about skilled trades companies, and I was especially drawn to electrical work. I enrolled in the electrical program at Lewiston Regional Technical Center and quickly realized I loved the trade. I enjoyed the hands-on work and the problem-solving. I knew I wanted to continue my education in this field.

When I began looking at college programs in Maine, I was excited, but I was also concerned about the cost. Tuition felt like a barrier, and I considered going straight into the workforce instead of pursuing additional training. Then I learned about the Maine Free College program. Finding out that tuition could be covered changed my decision entirely.

Because of Maine Free College, I was able to enroll in the one-year advanced electrical program at Washington County Community College. That opportunity allowed me to gain deeper technical knowledge and hands-on skills that I likely would not have developed if I had gone straight into the field.

This program has provided me with valuable training, confidence, and preparation for my career. I am graduating with strong skills and real-world experience, and I am able to do so without taking on large amounts of debt. That matters. It means I can start my career focused on building my future, not worrying about how I will repay loans.

Maine Free College has given me opportunity, direction, and confidence. It has helped me pursue a skilled trade that is in high demand across our state. Programs like electrical, welding, plumbing, and other trades are essential to Maine's workforce and economy. Supporting students in these pathways is an investment in our communities.

I am very thankful for this opportunity, and I respectfully ask you to continue supporting the Maine Free College program so that other students like me can pursue meaningful careers without financial barriers standing in the way.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'BK' or 'Bode Kunas', written in a cursive style.

Bode Kunas
Electrical Program Student
Washington County Community College