

**Testimony of Haden Buzzell, Student at SMCC  
In Support of L.D. 258**

***An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025***

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

**February 13, 2023**

Senator Rotundo, Senator Rafferty, Representative Sachs, Representative Brennan, and Members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Haden Buzzell. My hometown is West Newfield and I am a student at Southern Maine Community College, where I serve as president of the student government. I am here to testify in support of the two-year extension of the Free College Scholarship as recommended in the Governor's Budget.

I want to talk first about West Newfield, the town in which I grew up. Located about twenty minutes north of Sanford, we are a community of roughly 1,500, surrounded by dense forest and nestled in the foothills of the Appalachians. There is little economic activity in my town, or even within an hour's drive, and as a result many of the families in my school district struggle to get by. Often, they become stuck in low-paying jobs with few opportunities for advancement. For students in this situation, college often doesn't even enter the conversation.

Those who can afford to pay for college often leave Maine because they do not feel that its career prospects are adequate for young graduates. Indeed, many of my friends and classmates in high school left our state entirely. Some left for personal reasons, and some left looking for somewhere warmer, but many left looking for somewhere cheaper and with a brighter career outlook. There are towns like ours

all across Maine, and this has been a major enabling factor for the exodus of young talent from our state in recent decades.

But free community college provides us with a remedy. Not only does it allow students to learn skilled trades for low or no cost, but students pursuing a humanities, business, or STEM degree can use their two years as a launching pad to jumpstart their careers or earn a bachelor's degree from a four-year institution. Our school also accommodates non-traditional students; our community includes veterans, refugees, recent immigrants, and adults looking to enhance their credentials.

Since the Free College Scholarship applies to all high school graduates in the eligible years, our community colleges have attracted students from across the nation. In West Newfield, almost everyone is a lifelong Mainer. But at SMCC, I've met students from Iowa, Kansas, and even Angola and Mongolia. Not only will the Free College Scholarship keep young people in Maine, it also attracts them from other states and even other countries. In a state with an aging population like Maine, it is pivotal to our continued economic stability that we can ensure there are avenues for young people to succeed in our state.

The Free College Scholarship is such an avenue. On behalf of our state's youth, I ask that you support its extension as provided in the Governor's Budget.

Thank you.