

**Testimony from Maya Eichorn
Student at York County Community College**

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 Maya Eichorn. I live in York, and I am a student at York County Community College. I am here to testify in support of L.D. 258.

Almost three years ago, my high school transitioned all classes to an online format following the global outbreak of Covid-19. I struggled immensely with online school and took summer classes in an attempt to catch up. It did not go well. One year ago today, I was preparing to sign a piece of paper that would finalize my withdrawal from high school. I was dropping out to take the HiSET exam because I was ill prepared to return to in-person schooling. Today, I am a full-time college student with a 4.0 GPA and am preparing to run for president of my student senate. Without the Maine Free College program, I would be aimlessly moving through life and, if I had chosen to go to college, would probably be unable to afford basic necessities.

Throughout the state, but especially in York County, the cost-of-living is becoming prohibitively high for the younger generation. Rent is skyrocketing; food prices are rising; and the cost of raising children can be debilitating. For so many people, that has meant choosing between providing for themselves and their families and getting an education. Many college's tuition costs mean that students have to choose what food they can or cannot afford and what bills are most important to pay. This is not a sustainable state of living, and luckily, it is not a state of living that me and my peers are forced to face. Instead, with the Maine Free College Initiative, we can go to school while affording to survive.

In my time at York County Community College, I have met many incredible students. I have friends that work full time, take classes full time, and raise their children full time. I know students that provide for their families, students that live at home and are saving up for future schooling, students that are taking classes to discover what they want to do with their future, and students that are working full time as nurses, tax accountants, graphic designers, waitresses, and construction workers. All of these people are getting a free education so that they may join new professions, get higher-paying jobs, or learn important skills, and none of them would be able to afford it if it were not for the Maine Free College Initiative. It is a vital program that is positively impacting the lives of thousands of young Mainers.