

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Julia Noel, I'm from Sabattus and I am providing testimony in support of LD 447, *An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by Providing Funds to Maine's Community Colleges*.

I graduated from Central Maine Community College last year with a degree in Early Childhood Education and am continuing my journey at CMCC earning 90 credits that will transfer towards a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education at the University of Maine at Augusta. I am a member of the Women's Soccer team and work as a Resident Assistant in our dormitories on campus for the past three semesters.

This being said, I have had experience and personally benefitted from these initiatives outlined, as well as referred many students to utilize these services offered on our campus. First and foremost, working as an RA I have helped our residents work through their own mental health concerns in the dormitories; I can only imagine that the need for student mental health support could be even greater if students who aren't living on campus 24/7 took advantage of the services offered on campus. If contracted services through healthcare facilities continue to experience workforce shortages limiting how much support they can provide to us, additional funding could provide alternative resources and education for college staff to support the mental health needs that are dealt with on a daily basis. Having these additional mental health resources can only make a student's experience at CMCC better, allow them to focus on successful completion of their degree and build a better foundation to enter the workforce as a confident industry professional.

I am also very aware of the need for additional housing that would be needed for the students wishing to live on campus. With the increase of enrollment from students wanting to

attend college in a post-pandemic world and the state's Free College initiative, CMCC had more than 60 students living in off-campus housing and forced the College to think outside of the box when it came to providing the basics of dorm living: eating in the cafeteria, wireless internet, and transportation to and from campus are just a few of the adjustments that were made. If this trend continues, current accommodations just won't be enough.

Advocating for students and what they need to adequately learn is our top priority and includes providing the resources for following; books and other instructional materials, adequate housing, mental health support, and creating overall healthy learning and living environments. Although these are not the only areas of the school systems that require funding to be improved on, these are definitely the most important to ensure each student, as a whole, has the best experience and highest chance of success.

The additional funding would definitely make impactful changes at CMCC. The benefit would be felt not only by students, but employees and general support services in our community too.