

Testimony of Matthew Goodman,

In Support of L.D. 447

An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by Providing Funds to Maine's Community Colleges

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

March 6, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Matthew Goodman, I live in Bath, Maine, and I am a dean at Southern Maine Community College; 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*.

Throughout the country, historically, community colleges have been asked to do more with less, even though our students are some of higher education's most vulnerable. We are the community's college. World-class faculty, innovative academic programming, expert workforce training, and caring staff make this possible. Having spent my career in community colleges as a professor and administrator in Texas, Pennsylvania, and now Maine, I remain impressed by, and grateful for, this state's commitment to the Maine Community College System.

I experienced the power of community colleges at a young age. It took my mother six years to earn her associate's degree, while working full-time, raising three children, and attending our local community college at night. Fortunately, in my father, she had reliable childcare and a supportive spouse. First-generation students can lack support for myriad reasons, so we must be their navigators and support system. For our family, my mother's associate's degree is our proudest educational achievement. For other families, a degree ends the cycle of generational poverty.

Baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities love our students because students with credits or degrees from community colleges are proven completers; nationally, 49% of all graduates from four-year institutions previously enrolled at a public two-year college (American Association of Community Colleges, 2017). More seamless and equitable transfer pathways between Maine's community colleges and baccalaureate colleges and universities would increase degree attainment throughout Maine. Our students deserve such pathways and the requisite support to ensure they achieve their educational and career goals.

The HOPE Center for College, Community and Justice at Temple University launched the #RealCollege movement to advance affordability and basic security needs for college students. Their findings confirm what I have learned throughout 15 years in higher education: it is rarely the intellectual rigor of coursework that prevents students from being successful or earning their degree in a timely manner – if at all. Today's real college students, at two-year and four-year colleges alike, carry immense life challenges that require more intentional and intensive support from our institutions, both inside and outside of the classroom. The pandemic has compounded the mental health crises among our students, especially recent high school graduates. Put simply, students of any age or stage of life cannot successfully persist from semester to semester if their basic needs are not met and consumed by life's challenges. We must meet these students where they are and help remove barriers towards their success and degree completion. This bill will help us do just that.

Thank you for your time, your attention, and your continued service to this great state.