



# Maine Community College System

## OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

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TO: Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan  
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
FROM: David Daigler, President  
RE: Testimony in support of LD 447, An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by  
Providing Funds to Maine's Community Colleges  
DATE: March 6, 2023

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Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. I am David Daigler, the President of the Maine Community College System. 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* on behalf of the Maine Community College System.

Over the past three weeks, you have heard me tell the stories of students who have great need. You have heard me speak of our staff, working with very limited resources, who assist those same students with mental health supports, state and federal benefit paperwork, academic tutoring, housing, childcare, food, clothing and sometimes just a cup of coffee and a pep talk. On campus visits over the past four years as President, I heard directly from students, staff, full-time and adjunct faculty who unanimously agree that they need more resources to serve students to the best of their ability. They do what they can with what they have, but they see room for improvement with additional resources.

That need is what brings me to you today.

We have talked a lot about our pandemic affected students and the supports they need going forward.

This committee has heard from other parties about how much the pandemic has impacted K-12 students, particularly those high school students graduating and moving on to community colleges. There is no denying that many high school students simply didn't get the same education as before the pandemic – through no fault of their own, or the high schools. Face-to-face hours in the classroom were disrupted, large numbers of teachers were out and substitutes filled in sometimes for extended periods, students were struggling with personal and family issues that distracted them from their education, to name a few challenges. As those high school students enter our colleges, we can see different characteristics in these pandemic affected students. They need additional academic support – more tutoring, more time with professors, help with writing papers or using the library. They need more emotional support – more counselors, more accommodations for classwork, more chats with instructors, staff, coaches or RAs in the dorms.

These are all very high-touch needs – there's no free app for this and providing money to help pay for books won't solve it either. Maine's community colleges must provide new and additional resources to address these students' needs. This money will allow us to hire more people for these very specific roles to support these students, including more tutors, more after-hours counseling, expanding the hours and staffing in existing language labs, libraries, more resident advisors, more partnerships with community support groups. We are committed to not letting any of our students slip away because they couldn't get a call back, or an appointment with a counselor, or academic help.

But we need your help, and this funding, to get it done.

Our full-time and adjunct faculty and staff are all deeply engaged in this work. On the academic side of the house, we are changing the structure of the college experience. To help students have a more streamlined experience we have reorganized all of our two-year degrees, one-year certificates and our short-term workforce training options into eight pathways, sometimes known as "career clusters." This allows a student interested in, for example, health care, to understand all the choices within that career, and the many paths they can choose to pursue it.

This amounts to an individualized roadmap for each student, who sees the entirety of their community college experience in a single glance before they even take their first class: clear roadmaps on what classes to take to achieve a chosen outcome; internships and hands-on opportunities in their area of interest; local job market information and salary information for that career; and regular check-ins with advisors to make sure they're on track to graduate. This Guided Pathways work is being adopted at colleges across the nation as a best practice to save students time and money, improve retention, provide students with more up-front information about future earnings, and early results show great success. We are excited to be well underway in implementing this Guided Pathways work at all of our colleges. Again, this process requires a high-touch approach for success, and the funding from this bill will support this work.

Our colleges are also adopting strategies to address the high cost of textbooks and course material, such as using OER (open educational resources), subscription models, and loaner programs. We are offering flexible course schedules wherever possible: hyflex, hybrid, online options complement our in-person classrooms. Our colleges have restructured aid grants, expanded lab options, added weekend and night classes, and developed loaner programs to expand access to the tech tools students need. However, it is not enough. Quite frankly, we have done as much as we can with the resources allocated to us by our current tuition rate and state funding.

However, it is often our adult students, not recent high school graduates, who have the greatest needs. And the average age of all our students is 25 years old – most of our students already have busy, complicated lives. They have children, are single parents, care for elders in their family, juggle multiple low-wage jobs, and struggle to meet the costs of childcare, transportation, food and medical care.

That's why we've always been committed to creating holistic support networks that address the academic and personal needs of **all** students to ensure they can focus on their education. They can't study – or find the time to come on campus to meet with a tutor or counselor, or participate in student council, sports or student activities – if they can't afford gas, or arrange for childcare, or get the time off from work.

At Maine's community colleges, we want to create an environment that goes beyond providing tuition assistance – we need to help student meet their basic needs so they can focus on the education they want for a successful future.

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This initiative would provide funding to support learning and completion for students whose education was disrupted by the pandemic and led to gaps in learning and learning loss. This funding would provide:

- 20 additional navigator positions across the system focused on student success, career services, and retention, *\$2.1M*
- expansion of tutor positions and peer mentor support at all colleges, specifically in the areas of math and English, *\$1M*
- 4 positions in the learning commons to assist students with research and library needs, *\$280K*
- systemwide mental health support through virtual or on-campus staffing, *\$500K*
- 6.5 disability coordinator positions to assist students with learning disabilities and social skills, and community advocacy resource centers on multiple campuses to help students identify needs to be successful and connect them to both internal and external resources available, *\$520K*
- Additional funding to enhance student technology and course materials availability, renovate study and collaboration space, expand on campus housing support through housing scholarships, and professional development for staff focused on how to identify students who are struggling and determine barriers to success. *\$600K*