



Michael Tipping  
Senator, District 8

**THE MAINE SENATE**  
131st Legislature

3 State House Station  
Augusta, Maine 04333

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

I'm proud to present LD 512, a bill to reduce tuition and promote enrollment at public universities in Maine. This bill is written to do three things:

- It provides a 50% tuition waiver for students enrolled at an institution within the University of Maine System for up to four years for students who graduate high school or earn the equivalent certification in 2023, 2024 or 2025.
- It provides the same waiver for one year for returning students who have lived in Maine for at least five years and are 30 or fewer credit hours away from completing their degree.
- It requires the University of Maine System to report back on the outcome of this program.

For decades now, Maine has been failing to invest in higher education in general and in our students in particular. Through the eighties, nineties and early 2000s, post-secondary education funding in Maine was cut or frozen and students picked up the slack, with tuition at public universities rapidly rising.

Maine now has one of the lowest rates of students who attend college immediately after high school of any state in the country, and it's falling: from 63% in 2015 to 54% in 2021.

We place one of the highest debt loads on our students. The Institute for College Access & Success has classified us as one of ten "high-debt states." Compared to the other states on that list, we have a lower median income, making it harder to pay back debt in Maine and leading more young people to leave.

In my district, which includes Orono and Old Town, I know many people who have dropped out of school or who are having difficulty continuing right now. The cost of education combined with the stresses of the last few years and rampant inflation has brought many students to the breaking point.

At the same time, they're not getting more when they pay more. UMaine does have some beautiful new buildings with donors' names on them, but it also has more than a billion dollars in deferred maintenance. Students are more likely to see bricks fall off a facade or sit next to a pipe that's too hot to touch than to get to use the world's largest 3d printer. Many of their classes are now being taught by adjuncts, who themselves aren't making a living wage.

The members of this committee, the University of Maine System and the government of this state have all recognized this problem of underinvestment.



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In 2014 the Commission to Study College Affordability and College Completion, on which some of the members here served, released a report decrying the affordability gap and recommending investments to bring down tuition and debt. One recommendation was that Maine State Grant Program individual grants be increased from \$1,000 to \$2,500 immediately in order for them to have the same buying power as they did when they began. As you know, Maine did eventually make that investment, but not until this year, after another decade of inflation. We're still behind where we were in the nineties.

In 2016 and again in 2018, the University of Maine System released a Declaration of Strategic Priorities to Address Critical State Needs which called for the system to increase enrollment and "increase access and affordability and further reduce student debt associated with attainment." Rather than increasing, UMaine undergraduate enrollment is lower now than when those priorities were announced.

The Maine Department of Labor, Department of Education and other state bodies have all pledged to reach a goal of 60% of Mainers having a post-secondary credential by 2025. With two years left, we've barely cracked 50%.

What these studies, reports, promises and goals make clear is that we know that many of the problems we face as a state – from younger Mainers leaving to a lack of teachers, nurses and engineers, to new economic and environmental threats – can best be solved by investing in our students.

Economists estimate a 1:5 rate of return for investment in higher education in Maine, just in increased tax revenues, and that's amazing, but I don't know how you put a simple dollar amount on the impact of the next Caribou Russet potato, or the next Stephen King.

This specific proposal in LD 512 is meant to mirror the tuition waiver program now in place for Community College students. That's not because of a specific fear of relative enrollment shifts, although that could be happening, but because this is a way of providing higher education student support that the administration, legislature and institutions have all broadly agreed on and that we can easily expand.

I understand that there has been some confusion about whether this program as written would be open to out-of-state students and I would be happy to see a language change to specify a "Maine high school graduate" and "a Maine resident person who obtains the equivalent of a high school diploma."

I would like to thank the committee for their consideration of this legislation, their ongoing work on these issues and their focus on the needs of Maine students and the future of our state.