



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
323 State Street, Augusta, ME 04330-7131
(207) 629-4000 | Fax (207) 629-4048 | mccs.me.edu

TO: Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
FROM: Becky Smith, Director of Government and Community Relations
RE: Testimony in Support of LD 1028, *An Act to Expand the Higher Education Tuition Waiver for Persons Who Have Resided in Foster Care*
DATE: March 23, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, please accept this testimony in support of LD 1028 on behalf of the Maine Community College System.

As we have testified before this committee, the Maine Community College System's Board of Trustees has time and time again sought to assure that our doors are open to all students, regardless of need, as our budget allows. We work diligently to keep our tuition and fees as low as possible and, at this time, we are still the lowest in New England at \$96 a credit hour. Having said that, the legislature has often compelled us to grant cost waivers, without commensurate funding, to certain populations including students coming from Maine's foster care system.

This bill is different because while it adds slots for students in foster care, it also provides ongoing funding to support a portion of the program. This support is crucial, and we appreciate the sponsor's acknowledgement that Maine's public institutions of higher education cannot continue to offer tuition reductions while at the same time increase academic support and student services to meet the needs of our students without commensurate funding.

I believe that Samantha Warren from the University of Maine System is sharing a report from the Public Higher Education Systems Coordinating Committee workgroup on this topic, drafted in 2020, in response to legislation in the 129th Legislature that also sought to increase from 30 to 60 the number of available waivers. It is very thorough, and I highly recommend you review the report as you move forward with this bill. However, I wanted to draw your attention to this paragraph from the report:

The findings detailed on the pages that follow make clear the transformative power of this waiver and of access to affordable, quality postsecondary education in Maine for those who have been in State care. This report also brings into sharp focus that the current number of waivers is increasingly not meeting demand, especially as the number of youth in State care climbs and more Mainers understand the importance of obtaining a postsecondary degree or credential to getting a good-paying job that allows

them to be financially independent. Beyond needed State investment to expand the waiver program to increase college attainment, workforce readiness and self-sufficiency for these underserved students, investments in targeted services and supports are also needed to foster improved outcomes.

The Maine Community College System has approximately 20 students availing themselves of the waiver during any given year and we currently absorb those costs. We also provide wrap-around services to our students coming from foster care, and, in fact to all students, who may face challenges as they strive to succeed at our colleges.

We truly hope that we can partner with the legislature to assure that the over 2,000 Maine students in foster care can see public higher education in Maine as a solid foundation for their future. We understand the challenges faced by these students, as well as the foster and adoptive parents who offer them love and support and hope your committee will vote “ought to pass” in order to increase the number of students eligible for this waiver.