



Maine Community College System

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

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To: Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs;

From: David Daigler, President, Maine Community College System

**Re: Statement on Biennial Budget Change Package proposal for Fiscal Years 2024-2025
Language part QQQ**

Date: May 16, 2023

In the fall semester of 2022, the first students eligible for a Maine Free College Scholarship began enrolling in Maine's community colleges. What we learned in that first year has prompted us to request two non-monetary changes to the Governor's original budget proposal. These changes will allow us to serve these students better and meet the intent of the Free College Scholarship, which is to:

- Increase the number of pandemic-era students successfully earning a credential of value;
- Deliver more skilled workers to Maine employers; and
- Increase the number of students transferring to one of Maine's baccalaureate-granting institutions.

Using the current criteria, Free College Scholarship students must enroll full-time: 15 credits each semester or 30 credits over the academic year. However, we learned during the first year of the scholarship that some Free College Scholarship students took more credits than they could handle: they enrolled full-time but struggled to succeed and dropped classes. That experience has led to the understanding that requiring all Free College Scholarship students to enroll full-time is counterproductive to the goal of completing a credential.

As a result, our first requested change is to remove the "full-time" requirement and replace it with "completing studies at 200 percent of scheduled completion" (two years for a one-year certificate and four years for a two-year associate degree.)

Maine community college advisors will still encourage students to enroll full-time but will carefully tailor that advice to fit each student's circumstances.

There is good reason to select 200% as the new measure: National research and MCCS student success analysis demonstrate that the highest credential completion centers around 200% of scheduled completion.

Our second change allows students to enroll within two years of their high school graduation. The current legislation stipulates that qualifying students enroll by the 2023-24 academic year. By allowing one or two gap years, students who did not attend college immediately after high school have matured and had time to experience the realities of life after high school, which better informs their college-going decision. With real-world experience and maturity, they are motivated to succeed and are an asset to their learning community.

These proposals do not have any financial impact on the existing Free College program or on the fiscal note for the Governor's recommendation to extend the program to the classes of 2024 and 2025.

Thank you for considering these changes. The Free College Scholarship has proven to be an incredible success.

In its first year, it attracted more than 700 students from the classes of '20 and '21 who had clearly chosen not to pursue any post-secondary education – precisely the students the scholarship was meant to attract. We can't know how many students in the class of 22 or 23 have been persuaded to attend, but it is likely over 1,000. For thousands more, who were already enrolled at a community college or always intended to attend college, their success rates have improved, making their education is more affordable.

Looking forward, more Free College students today mean more community college graduates tomorrow who are transferring to four-year colleges or entering the Maine workforce with the skills they need to thrive in the 21st-century economy - skills desperately needed by today's employers. Free College Scholarship students pursue certificates and degrees to become electricians, plumbers, nurses, automotive workers, machinists, IT specialists, educators, firefighters, and police officers.

Our graduates are the backbone of Maine's economy and provide meaningful, mission-critical work throughout the state.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.