

**Testimony of Joe Cassidy
In Opposition to**

**Part CCCC of
LD 210, An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund
and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain
Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the
Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027**

Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

February 7, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Joe Cassidy, and I am the president of Saint Joseph's College. I testify today in strong opposition to Part CCCC of LD 210 (the Biennial Budget).

Part CCCC limits the use of the Maine State Grant Program to students attending Maine institutions of public higher education, thereby excluding the long time use of the Maine State Grant by Maine students wanting to attend one of Maine's independent colleges or universities.

- Saint Joseph's College of Maine is a small Catholic Private College located in Standish, Maine. We were established 113 years ago by the Sisters of Mercy, and to this day their spirit continues to animate our work with students and in our community. We have about 700 students living with us on campus and another 500 students enrolled online.
- Saint Joseph's College currently serves students from all 16 of Maine's counties, most of whom come from Maine's working class families. 44% of Saint Joseph's College Students are Pell eligible and 57% of our students are first generation college students. This year 211 Saint Joseph's College students utilized the Maine State Grant to help them and their families make SJC an affordable choice for them.
- Saint Joseph's College is committed to doing our part to ensure that higher education at our college is affordable for these families. In the current fiscal year, while families utilized about \$500,000 dollars of Maine State Grants money to help pay for their tuition, Saint Joseph's College provided \$19.3 million in institutional aid through tuition assistance and waivers to its students. That number excludes federal assistance.
- The average Maine student and their family pays about \$11,000 per year in tuition to attend Saint Joseph's College. For most of our Maine State Grant eligible students, the grant equals

between 5% and 10% percent of their total aid package. As we work with families to arrange a financial aid package that will work for them and allow their student to attend their first choice for college, we see how important the Maine State Grant is. While the grant may seem like a modest one to some, it often makes the difference for students and families.

- While Saint Joe's draws students in from around New England - and many of those students remain in Maine after graduation - 59% of our students are from small, medium, and large cities and towns around Maine. We attract some students from the greater Portland area, but most of our students come from rural areas in Cumberland, York, Androscoggin, Sagadahoc Counties and beyond. Our students tell us that they choose to study at Saint Joseph's because we are small, offer a family-like experience, and provide support that grows out of that intimacy. For some, our position as a Catholic college matters. Interestingly, we have Muslim students and Jewish students and students from no faith tradition who are attracted to Saint Joseph's College by our curriculum based in service to others and to community.
- Saint Joseph's College graduates can be found all across our state. Our nurses are caring for patients in hospitals throughout Maine, our education graduates are teaching at all levels in Maine's K-12 schools, and are heavily represented in Math and Science classrooms, our business women and men work helping sustain many of Maine's top companies, and graduates serve on innumerable public and private boards.
- Saint Joseph's College, like our counterpart private colleges around the state, fills an important role in helping Maine reach its goal of having 60% of Maine residents holding a meaningful college credential. We prepare students to support critical needs in our healthcare system as nurses and other health professionals, teach in Maine's k-12 schools, lead Maine businesses, and nonprofits.
- Barring applicability of the Maine State Grant will limit the higher education options for Maine students and their families. Our state will not be well served by removing valuable options that Maine students have when they choose which college is most likely to serve their needs as they prepare for careers supporting the Maine economy.
- As Maine continues to position itself for economic success and development, having a robust and varied set of choices for Maine students to pick from when they decide on a college is critical. There are students who want and need a college experience that is only available at Saint Joseph's College. The Maine State Grant is a critical tool that students and families must continue to have access to to allow them to be successful in their career and in their lives here in Maine.

Thank you for your consideration, and I strongly urge you to vote to remove Part CCCC from the Biennial Budget.