

**Kierstyn Lyons, University of Maine at Augusta Student (Mexico, ME)  
Testimony in Support of Funding in the FY26-27 Biennial Budget for the  
University of Maine System (LD 210, Page A-636)**

Hello Senators Rotundo and Rafferty, Representatives Gattine and Murphy, and members of the Appropriations and Education Committees.

My name is Kierstyn Lyons and I am from Mexico, Maine. I am currently a Nursing student at the University of Maine in Augusta. I am here today to speak in support of the proposed funding in the budget for the University of Maine System and to share my story on how previous State funding has helped me pursue college and a healthcare career.

I graduated high school in 2020, which meant the COVID-19 pandemic had just begun. Like many other young people, I was unsure what career I wanted to pursue. With all this uncertainty, I ended up attending Central Maine Community College, where I received my associate degree in Life Sciences. Due to the free community college scholarship, I was able to do so without paying tuition, which saved me thousands of dollars. Thank you.

This time at community college allowed me to figure out what career I wanted to pursue, and I eventually decided on nursing, with hopes to one day become a Nurse Practitioner, which requires a bachelor's of nursing and a master's degree.

As many of you know, there is a severe shortage of nurses and doctors in Maine and Nurse Practitioners are an important part of the solution. I was attending college during the peak of the pandemic, and nurses were considered the warriors of the pandemic. For some people, this stressful time may have turned them away from this career, but I was drawn to it. I started looking for a nursing bachelor's degree program I could transfer into that would accept my credits and that would be affordable.

I did some research and found out about UMA, which not only accepted my community college credits but also offered me highly affordable tuition that was made even more so thanks to a generous transfer scholarship.

I am a first-generation college student from a middle-class family in rural Maine and the idea of spending a lot of money on my higher education was scary, and not really an option for me. This is the case for many of my peers, and the reason so many do not attend college. UMA has made it possible for me to pursue my aspirations of becoming a Nurse Practitioner without the burden of college debt.

Now I am going to be graduating in May of this year with my bachelor's in nursing, and get to help grow the nursing workforce in Maine and provide compassionate care in my community. I'm also one step closer to reaching my goal of being a Nurse Practitioner.

The funding provided by the Governor and the Legislature for the University of Maine System provided me with a quality education at an affordable cost, and I am very grateful for that.

I wanted to share my story in support of the university because there are so many people out there who dream of getting a four-year college degree but can't afford to or don't want to drown in college debt. While free community college is important, so too is continuing to invest in the University of Maine System so the doors it opens to opportunity and the Maine workforce are open to people like me too.

I want to thank you for your time and this opportunity to share my story, and for your support of BOTH Maine's Community College System and the University of Maine System.