

TO: Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

FROM: Christopher Anderson, Advisor and Instructor, Southern Maine Community College
RE: Testimony in support of LD 680, An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by
Providing Funds to Maine's Community Colleges
DATE: March 17, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Chris Anderson, I live in Falmouth, ME, and I am an Advisor and part of the faculty of English at Southern Maine Community College. I am here today in support of LD 680, An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by Providing Funds to Maine's Community Colleges.

Over the past four years, 17,151 Free-College eligible students have enrolled in MCCC. The direct from high school class increased by 1,000 students in 2 years and is expected to stabilize at 28% of a graduating class, equal to 3,500 students. These numbers are in sync with Strategy A in Maine's 2020-2029 Economic Development Strategy, which is to grow local talent by increasing access to activities in MCCC. But, who will support them?

Expanding access to education in MCCC in order to grow and retain local talent without also increasing the staff to support those students is ethically irresponsible. It wastes taxpayer dollars by enrolling students who will drop out. Study after study demonstrate a correlation between creating a human connection at college and completing a credential. As more courses move online and dependency on adjunct teaching increases, support staff are vital to student success. Successful students turn into financially responsible citizens that support their local community. The success of these students will shape our future lives.

My advising case load is over 300 students, plus 80 from teaching. I'm not special. All carry these loads and almost 50% of our staff advisors also teach. We had ten staff advisors a year ago, soon we will have seven. Shrinking by a third means 125 more students. When will I see them?

Though many student concerns are acute, average wait time is three weeks. I suppose now it will be four. That's a quarter of our 16-week semester or half of our eight-week semester.

I love education. I didn't enter it for the money. I was quite aware that staff are compensated at levels below what most of the students we teach and advise will earn. I chose to work at a Community College. MCCS provides practical skills to anyone, at any level, to make their life better. In this sense, I don't just love it, I believe in it. I believe in its ability to transform people's lives. And, this is not a power I have faith in. It's a power I see in full every week. People taking steps to make their lives better, the lives of their family better, the lives of their neighbors better in the face of severe adversity. Few institutions can really claim that. The formula for increasing the results of this are simple – we need you to believe in the power of education as well. To believe in MCCS as a tool to ensure that the communities throughout Maine have a future.

This money is a conservative investment. There is no risk. There are well-documented links between student success and pathway advising. Without money to hire and retain staff to meet the needs of increasing student enrollment, we can't do pathway advising. Your vote will have deep reverberations, impacting not only staff and students, but the future communities where our students end up living and working. Thank you for your time.