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

FROM: David Daigler, President, Maine Community College System

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 David Daigler, President of the Maine Community College System.

I would like to start by thanking President Daughtry for her unwavering support of the Maine Community College System, our students and staff, and, in fact, all of higher education in Maine.

I am here to today to support LD680, aptly named *An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by Providing Funds to Maine's Community Colleges*.

The funds in this bill will directly assist the students at Maine's community colleges and through that, all of Maine. Our colleges are widening the pipeline for more skilled graduates entering the workforce and increasing transfers to our four-year college partners.

At the State of MCCS last Tuesday, you heard me tell stories of students who overcame their anxieties, worked hard and are either on their way to graduating or who have already graduated and are beginning successful careers.

Their success relied on the dedication of our staff — working with very limited resources — who assisted those same students with counseling, state and federal benefit paperwork, academic tutoring, housing, childcare, food, clothing and sometimes just a cup of coffee and a pep talk.

During the budget hearings, you heard directly from students. I think about the power of those stories every day. I am grateful that they took the time to share their stories with you and I realize that the fact that they took the time to come to Augusta is indicative of how important our work is to them.

I often hear directly from staff and faculty — full-time and adjuncts — about the stress they feel every day. It is not in their constitution to ignore a student in need, but they need more resources to serve our students. They do what they can with what they have, but they are being worked to — and often beyond — their limit.

That is why I stand before you today.

There is no denying that many of today's pre-K-12 students simply didn't get the same education as their peers who came to college before the pandemic.

It is not their fault. It is not the secondary school's fault.

Face-to-face hours in the classroom were disrupted, large numbers of teachers were out and substitutes filled in sometimes for extended periods, students were struggling with personal and family issues and isolation that distracted them from their education and delayed some of their coping and interpersonal skills. As those students enter our colleges, as they will continue to for the next decade, we recognize that they need additional academic support – more tutoring, more time with professors, help with writing papers or using the library. They need more emotional support – more counselling, more accommodations for classwork, more chats with instructors, staff, coaches or RAs in the dorms.

And our adult learners have children, are often single parents, they may be caring for elders in their family, juggling multiple low-wage jobs, and struggling to meet the costs of childcare, transportation, food and medical costs. Several of our adult learners did not succeed in college in the past and are taking a big risk coming back.

These are all very high-touch needs. Maine's community colleges must provide new and additional resources to address these students' needs.

This money will allow us to hire more people to meet the needs of these students — including more tutors, more after-hours counseling, expanding the hours and staffing in existing language labs, libraries, more resident advisors, more partnerships with community support groups. It would also allow us to provide deeper professional development to our current staff so they have the tools to identify and then support our students who are struggling.

We are committed to not letting any of our students slip away because they couldn't get a call back, or an appointment with a counselor, or academic tutoring. But we need this funding to do all that.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to entertain any questions now or for the work session.