

**TO: Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs**
FROM: Dr. Elizabeth True, Vice President of Eastern 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 Dr. Elizabeth True from Sedgwick, and I serve as Vice President and Dean of Students at Eastern Maine Community College. I am here today to testify in support of LD 680, An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by Providing Funds to Maine's Community Colleges. As Vice President, I oversee enrollment management and student success programs, designed to support the student from application through to graduation. Before I became Vice President, I was the satisfied parent of a proud graduate of EMCC.

Students entering college for the first time encounter a variety of challenges, and learning how to identify and solve these diverse challenges is an ongoing process. Some students enter college with more of the skills necessary for navigating the academic demands of independent learning and personal responsibility. These students maximize their learning opportunities in the small class sizes, practical training, and personal relationships with their instructors our college offers.

Other students enter with significant gaps in skills which can make their academic experience overwhelming and in some cases, unsuccessful. The transition from high school to college can be particularly challenging for those who expect that community college is basically 13th grade. They may not know how to keep track of assignments and deadlines in courses without daily reminders. Studying and preparing for college classes is very different from completing high school homework.

At least 38% of our students are identified as first-generation college students, without the support and expertise of parents who are familiar with the challenges and resources of college. All of our traditional-aged students survived a few years of pandemic schooling, and survival during lockdown was the primary goal. They have now entered college without having experienced enough academic challenge and support in high school, through no fault of their own, and are significantly behind in their academic, cognitive, and psychosocial development.

We also have an increasing number of students who received special education services in high school. Our Accessibility Services office is ready to help them make the transition to college and access appropriate accommodations, but the process for accommodations in post-secondary settings is very different from K-12, and many students do not request accommodations in college for a variety of reasons. EMCC is also experiencing increasing numbers of students who are on the autism spectrum. We also have a large population of adult learners who did not experience an educational system in their youth that prioritized identifying and remediating learning problems.

Our staff are dedicated to our students' success, but their jobs have changed dramatically in the last five years. What used to be a five minute conversation with a student about how to complete a task is often now at least a thirty minute session to compensate for their lack of executive functioning skills. We love the opportunity to solve problems with students and help them achieve their goals, but I would have much more confidence in our capacity to meet our current students' needs if we had additional staff who

could provide essential, individualized support as college navigators, supplemental instructors, and learning specialists.

I very much appreciate the opportunity to discuss these needs with you today and hope you will support LD 680 and by doing so, set more students up for success in learning the essential trades and knowledge to be productive contributors to Maine's future.