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Support of L.D. 680
An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by Providing Funds to Maine's
Community Colleges.

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
March 17, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Jean Blais, Student Services Administrator at Central Maine Community College, and I am writing in strong support of LD 680, An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by Providing Funds to Maine's Community Colleges.

Maine Community Colleges serve a diverse student population, including first-generation students, working adults, parents, and individuals facing financial and personal challenges. Many of these students struggle with stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions that significantly impact their academic success and overall well-being.

As an administrator at Central Maine Community College, I witness these mental health challenges firsthand. Students struggling with mental health issues often face difficulties concentrating, completing assignments, and engaging in class. Without proper support, many underperform academically, withdraw from courses, or ultimately drop out of college.

Currently, Central Maine Community College has only one mental health counselor available on campus just one day a week for in-person counseling, with online counseling offered on other days. While virtual options provide some level of support, they do not fully replace the need for in-person services, particularly for students in crisis. Due to the high demand for mental health services, counselors' schedules are full, leading to long wait times for students seeking help. Many students who need immediate support are left without timely access to the care they require, exacerbating their struggles and increasing the likelihood of them leaving college.

This issue extends beyond student well-being—it directly impacts student retention, academic achievement, and the future of Maine's workforce. Providing the necessary supports for student success is crucial to ensuring students have the resources to thrive.

I strongly urge funding for LD 680, the Student Retention and Success Bill. This bill would provide much-needed resources to expand mental health services, including hiring additional counselors to reduce wait times and ensure students receive timely, in-person support. Increased access to counseling can make the difference between a student persisting through their education or dropping out due to unaddressed mental health struggles.

I respectfully request your support for LD 680. Investing in our students is an investment in Maine's future—ensuring that students receive the support they need to thrive academically, graduate successfully, and contribute to our workforce and communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.