

FROM: MATTHEW J. GOODMAN, ED.D., INTERIM ACADEMIC DEAN/VICE
PRESIDENT, 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 Matthew J. Goodman, I live in Bath, and I am interim Academic Dean and Vice President 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.

Of the 1,026 community colleges throughout the country, I am proud to represent one of Maine's seven community colleges. According to the American Association of Community Colleges, approximately 40% of all undergraduate students in the United States are currently studying at a community college. While impressive to know that two out of every five college students are enrolled in a community college, you may be further surprised to learn that roughly 60% of all bachelor's degree holders in the United States have earned college credits from a community college at some point throughout their educational journey. Our students, though resilient, often carry substantial burdens.

Unlike our four-year university partners, community college students primarily attend school part-time. This is for a variety of reasons, but many of which revolve around the reality that our students are significant financial providers and often the primary, or only, caregivers for their family. 60% of part-time students work full-time jobs, and over 40% of full-time students work full-time jobs while enrolled at community colleges. The numbers are similar at SMCC. There is a direct correlation to the number of credits a student earns each semester and their time to graduation. Graduation, retention, and student success rates among community college students lag behind their four-year university counterparts; this, however, has little to do with one's intellectual capacity in the classroom. Research leaders in higher education point to something else: LIFE, in all capital letters, presents external barriers which far-too-often prevent community college students from earning obtaining their educational goals in a timely manner, or at all.

We know that students succeed at a higher rate when they have appropriate supports and strong networks that can pick them up or keep them on track. For students who are the first to attend college in their family, which account for one-third of our students, it is an even more imposing task when your family does know how to support you because college is something of an enigma. For students with disabilities, who account for nearly one quarter of community college students, college-provided support is equally invaluable. These are but two of myriad reasons why your support is so vital.

Historically, community colleges have been underfunded and under resourced, yet they are responsible for serving some of our most vulnerable neighbors. Still, we persevere and continue to be an engine that lifts communities and propels local and state economies. At the community colleges, we will continue to do all we can to remove barriers to students' success. With your increased support, we can provide the support our students deserve, and we can attract and retain the innovative teachers, advisors, and workforce development that our communities need. I have

spent two decades in higher education, in four different states, and dedicated nearly all of my career to community colleges. The State of Maine has, time and again, proven that it can be a leader across the United States, and this is also true for its role in higher education. I am so grateful for your continued commitment to Maine's community colleges, and I respectfully ask that you build upon this commitment with further investment so that we can continue to strengthen Maine for decades to come. We don't just change lives, we transform family trees and communities. We are the community's college.