



Mike Tipping
Senator, District 8

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and honorable members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Mike Tipping. I represent Senate District 8 in Penobscot County and I'm here today to present LD 700, An Act to Promote Student Enrollment and Degree Completion in the University of Maine System by Awarding Waivers of Tuition and Fees to Eligible Students.

This is a resubmission of a committee amendment to my bill, LD 512 in the 131st legislature, which I'm very grateful that the members of the Education Committee made a priority for funding last term.

LD 700 would address a need that is critical for student enrollment and degree completion – closing the last gap in the cost to attend college for students from Maine who have qualified for a Federal Pell Grant. It would pay the final difference between what they receive from the grant and the tuition and fees at their university.

For decades now, Maine has been failing to invest in higher education in general and in our students in particular. Through the eighties, nineties and early 2000s, post-secondary education funding in Maine was cut or frozen and students picked up the slack, with tuition at public universities rapidly rising as the state share of funding declined.

Maine now has one of the lowest rates of students who attend college immediately after high school of any state in the country and we place one of the highest debt loads on our students. The Institute for College Access & Success has classified us as one of ten "high-debt states." Compared to the other states on that list, we have a lower median income, making it harder to pay back debt and leading more young people to leave Maine.

This bill would be a step toward addressing that lack of investment by funding a program that has already proven a success on some campuses within the UMaine system and that would assist those students who most need our support.

Pell Grants are only awarded to students who can prove exceptional financial need or have had a parent die while serving on active duty in the U.S. armed forces or as a public safety officer. These are students for whom that last gap in paying for college can make the crucial difference.

I know it has made a difference in my own family. My mother grew up poor and was the first person in her family to be accepted to college, along with a full scholarship. She had to turn it down, because she and her family couldn't pay for room and board. For her, as for many of

these students, it was an issue of money, not merit. She eventually went back to school as an adult and completed her Ph.D. in Psychology with an internship at the University of Maine.

This bill represents an investment in bright, dedicated young people. It makes their lives a little easier and their dreams a little closer and it helps them to stay in Maine and contribute to our state. I appreciate your consideration and I'm happy to answer any questions.