

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

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Statement in support of the Maine Community College System's portion of LD 2212, An Act Making Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027. Part A, page 17 and Language QQQ.

Senator Rotundo, Senator Rafferty, Representative Gattine and Representative Murphy, members of the Joint Standing Committee Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Jean Blais, and I serve as Interim Associate Dean of Students at Central Maine Community College in Auburn, and I reside in Lewiston. I am testifying today in support of the Maine Community College System's portion of LD 2212, that continue the Maine Free College program.

The Maine Free Community College program has created meaningful opportunity for students across our state. I have seen firsthand how the program encourages recent high school graduates to take the next step in their education with confidence. The reduced financial burden makes enrollment far more manageable and allows students to move forward without the overwhelming fear of debt. As a result, more students are enrolling immediately after graduation, staying on track academically, and building momentum toward their educational and career goals.

Beyond affordability, the program expands access and opportunity for students across Maine, particularly those from rural communities, first-generation college students, and individuals from lower income households. Ultimately, the program not only supports individual student success but also strengthens Maine's workforce and the economy. When students are able to pursue degrees and credentials in high-demand fields such as healthcare, advanced manufacturing, education, and the skilled trades, they are preparing to meet critical workforce needs in our communities. These students are not only improving their own economic mobility, they are strengthening Maine's economy, supporting local businesses, and contributing to the long-term vitality of our state. This program reflects a commitment to investing in Maine people and ensuring that opportunity remains within reach for those who want to learn, work, and stay here in Maine.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and for your continued commitment to Maine students and families.