

Senator Rotundo, Senator Rafferty, Representative Gattine and Representative Murphy, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Jean Ginn Marvin. I reside in Scarborough, and I am testifying here today in support of the portions of LD 2212 that continue the Maine Free College program (Part A, page 17 and language QQQ).

I am currently the longest serving member of the Maine Community College Board of Trustees, having been appointed twice by Governor LePage and twice by Governor Mills. I am proud to work in Maine's hospitality industry as the Innkeeper at The Nonantum Resort in Kennebunkport. I am here today not just as a business professional, but as someone who cares deeply about the future of our state and the young people who will shape it.

Maine has the oldest population in the country. We all know this. We talk about it often. But the question is: what are we going to do about it? Free community college is one of the most effective tools we have to keep young people in Maine and to build the workforce our economy desperately needs.

In my industry, we struggle every day to find workers. We need chefs, hospitality managers, accountants, maintenance technicians, marketing professionals, and trained front-line staff. Our colleagues in healthcare, construction, manufacturing, and childcare are facing the same crisis. Positions go unfilled. Hours are reduced. Growth plans are put on hold.

This is not because there is no opportunity in Maine. It is because there are not enough trained people to fill the jobs.

Free community college has changed lives. It has opened doors for students who may never have believed college was possible. It has allowed first-generation students, working parents, and recent high school graduates to say "yes" to education instead of "I can't afford it." I have seen young employees begin taking classes because they finally could. I have seen families feel relief knowing their child could pursue higher education without taking on crushing debt. That relief matters. That opportunity matters. And it's working.

More Maine families are sending their children to college than ever before. Enrollment is up. Students who complete two years debt-free are realizing that a bachelor's degree is now within reach. The University of Maine System numbers are up as well as students continue their education because the first step was financially possible.

This is not just about tuition. It is about hope.

When we tell a young person in Maine that they can earn a degree or a credential without being buried in debt, we are telling them they have a future here. We are telling them they do not have to leave the state to find opportunity.

If we end this program, what message are we sending? That opportunity has an expiration date? That workforce development is optional? That we are willing to let one of our most effective retention tools disappear?

At a time when Maine desperately needs more workers, more young families, and more long-term residents, removing free community college would move us backward.

Keeping it moves us forward. It strengthens our workforce. It supports our businesses.

It keeps young people here. It gives Maine a fighting chance against the demographic challenges we all acknowledge.

I respectfully urge you to support restoring free community college in the budget — not just as an education initiative, but as a commitment to Maine's future.

Thank you for your time and your consideration. I am happy to take any questions.

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