

Maine Education Association

Jesse Hargrove President | Beth French Vice President | Jaye Rich Treasurer
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

Testimony

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

Jan Kosinski, Government Relations Director, Maine Education Association

Before the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

February 20, 2026

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and

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

My name is Jan Kosinski, and I am the Government Relations Director for the Maine Education Association (MEA), and I am specifically here today to testify on behalf of the Community College Faculty Association (CCFA). The Community College Faculty Association is an affiliate of the MEA and represents the full-time faculty throughout Maine's Community College System (MCCS).

We want to be clear and unequivocal – the Community College Faculty Association supports the Free Community College program. The front-line faculty have seen, first-hand, the impact this program has on lifting aspirations and helping students develop lifelong skills that will help them in their careers and professions.

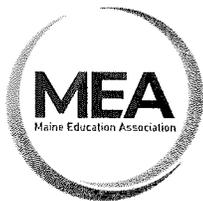
We appreciate the Governor's efforts to make the program permanent in the supplemental budget proposal and we applaud the effort to focus resources on residents. While only a small number of out-of-state students utilized the Free Program, we understand the desire to restrict our state's resources to residents of the state.

While the Free Program has certainly had a major impact on students, there are real reasons to be concerned about the current structure of the program.

First, faculty report to us that the Free Program has created unfortunate inequities among the students they are serving. An 18-year-old with few responsibilities who recently graduated from high school and is attending for free may be sitting next to a single parent who is working, paying

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bills, maybe caring for children/dependents, while going to school and paying full tuition. The desire to help recent high school graduates is commendable, but we are worried of an arbitrary and unfair distinction that provides free community college for some, but not others.

The proposal from the Governor extends the program beyond specific high school graduation classes and would offer the Free Community College Program to any “person who obtains the equivalent of a high school diploma in the previous two academic years.” This may help but does not remove the inequities we are seeing.

Second, we have deep concerns about the financial impact of Free Community College on the overall system’s finances. Tuition only funds part of the costs of educating each student, and the Free Community College funding is a tuition replacement system, but we worry the system needs more funding besides subsidized tuition. The trajectory of the system undeniably favors enrollment numbers over quality. We believe students deserve ACCESS and QUALITY and we are worried the program currently provides ACCESS but sacrifices QUALITY.

The Community College System has seen significant increases in enrollment since the creation of the Free Community College Program. According to a press release from the System, “Since fall 2022, 17,826 Free College-eligible students have enrolled at Maine’s community colleges. In fall 2024, there were 8,989 Free College-eligible students enrolled, out of a total enrollment of 21,385 students. Enrollment has increased 23% since the pre-pandemic fall 2019 enrollment of 17,327.”¹

¹ Please see, “Maine’s Free Community College Scholarship Ends With Class of 2020”, June 23, 2025 found here: [Maine’s Free Community College Scholarship Ends With Class Of 2025 - Maine Community College System](#)



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Slide 1: Free Community College Enrollment and Participation

Access (for some) has increased.

- All time highs . +3% over last year's highs.
- 61% Free College Eligible
- ~32% actually access MFC funds
- ~70% still Pell/State Grant (non MFC) eligible.

Non-trads, workers, adult learners often lack access to both federal and state funding due to age and income

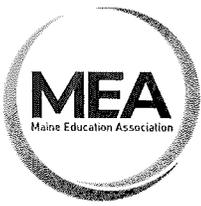
Fall Enrollment up 3% at Maine's Community Colleges			
	Fall Enrollment		
	2024	2025	% Change
Central Maine Community College	3,011	3,248	+7.9%
Eastern Maine Community College	2,120	2,111	-0.4%
Kennebec Valley Community College	1,663	1,629	-2.0%
Northern Maine Community College	663	596	-10.1%
Southern Maine Community College	6,095	6,451	+5.8%
Washington County Community College	631	571	-9.5%
York County Community College	1,183	1,227	+3.7%
MCCS Total	15,366	15,833	+3.0%

Excludes Early College. All data as of October 15.

Source: MCCS website/release; 2023 Free College Report.

Nearly 70% of our students were already 'free' under the Pell program, and the state's last-dollar design means little new money reached campuses. The result is more students, the same dollars, and a system stretching thinner every year.

For some schools, those two things might run parallel tracks: more students mean more revenue means better quality. For MCCS, we worry this dynamic means deeper financial holes and more corner cutting.



Slide 2: Operating Revenue for the Maine Community College System, FY 2019 vs FY 2024

Losing ground

Thousands more students, no real gain in operating revenue.
 Access increased; capacity did not.

Year	Tuition and Fees Revenue (\$M)	Change
FY 2019	~40 million	—
FY 2024	~46.6 million	+\$6.6 million nominal - \$1.2 million real/inflation adjusted

While the Community College System has welcomed thousands more students into the programs since the adoption of the Free Community College Program, the System has not seen commensurate resources to provide high-quality programs to these students. In fact, although gross tuition and fee revenue increased about 17% between FY2019 and FY2024, cumulative inflation over that period was roughly 18–20%, meaning tuition revenue has been flat to slightly declining in real dollars.

MCCS’s operating revenues were already flat in real terms —when Free College drove a sudden enrollment surge, the **same limited dollars had to stretch across far more students, accelerating the erosion of quality.**

To add a finer point to this argument, the tuition MCCS charges does not cover expenses, and the current Free Program serves as a tuition replacement program, thus leaving the system completely stretched to meet the needs of the surging demand.



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Slide 3: MCCS Current Funding Model

DATE

Current funding model

Current Tuition: \$96 per credit hour + fees

Total Operating Expense:

\$160,581,972 / 297,043 credit hours = **\$540.60** cost to deliver a single credit

Total Instructional Operating Expense:

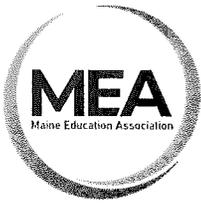
\$58,204,592 / 297,043 credit hours = **\$195.95** instructional costs associated with a single credit

More students does not mean healthier budgets or better quality –right now it means the opposite.

Source: MCCS Audited Financial Statements

According to the System's audited financial statements, tuition is \$96 per credit hour, yet instructional costs alone are \$195.95 per credit hour per student. This means the System is short \$100 per student for every credit taught to each student. The System's operating expenses are \$540 per credit hour – again far less than the \$96 per credit hour students are charged.

Given this financial picture, we should not be surprised to hear the result is faculty stretched to the limit and unhappy with the System overall, and decreased student satisfaction.



Slide 4: MCCS Faculty Survey Results

Faculty are stretched

Faculty Compensation Survey (2024) (50% response rate n=188)

- 56% have considered leaving due to salary
- 91% *must* seek additional work (more classes, per diem, etc.)
- 51% classified salary as poor or very poor
- 41% of faculty workforce has less than 5 years' experience

Students deserve stable programs & experienced faculty.

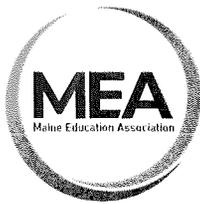
Our results mirror MCCS' own survey conducted by APC (below general and industry-specific benchmarks); also acknowledged in MCCS strategic plan.

Slide 5: MCCS Faculty Pay Lags Behind

...and here's why

- Last in New England in faculty pay and 20% behind Nat'l Average
- 0.33% average annual raise in real dollars since 2008
- 15 years of service = ~4.95% raise in real dollars

(source: NEA employment data; MCCS/CCFA collective bargaining agreements)



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Teachers in MCCS are the lowest paid in New England and 20% below the national average. Over 15 years, faculty have seen a mere 4.95% increase in salary in real dollars with an average annual raise of .33%. The low wages have real impacts on the faculty and staff.

The mission of the Community College System is to respond to the labor market demands. Running completely threadbare undermines the ability to do that.

A case study: a nursing position at Kennebec Valley Community College was open for over a year, directly and unquestionably related to low pay for that level of expertise. Amid statewide nursing shortage crisis, we find this is unacceptable.

There are many stories like this across the system. Faculty in many fields regularly report that they can earn more by practicing their trade in the private sector, rather than teaching other students.

This leads to less program stability and more reliance on adjuncts, which are not markers of thriving academic departments.

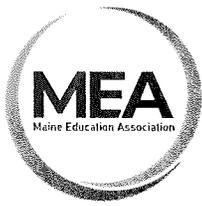
The results are impacting the overall student experience.

Slide 6: Student Satisfaction Concerns

Early signs of troubling trend

According to the 2025 Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, MCCS students have significant concerns about instruction, course availability, technology and staff responsiveness.

These are the very areas constrained by stagnant funding.



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In the July 18, 2025 letter to David Daigler, the President of the Community College System, the Chairs of this Committee asked “Does the Free Community College Program result in an economy of scale that helps address operational expenses for the overall community college system in a way that could achieve savings and that could reduce the state's allocation?” The full-time faculty would say unequivocally NO. In fact, what we are finding is larger class sizes, more students, yet salaries and wages that are stagnant and not keeping up with inflation. We are seeing more access to the community colleges, but degrading quality.

I want to end where I started – the Community College Faculty Association supports the Free Program. Maine has opened the doors to colleges for more students than ever before, and we applaud policymakers for the decision that led us here. However, **we must ensure what students find inside is what they deserve.**

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.