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TO: Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
FROM: David Daigler, President
RE: Statement in support of LD 761, *An Act to Establish the Maine Community College System Pell Grant Match Program*
DATE: April 23, 2021

I appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 761.

As this committee well knows, funding to meet our obligations for on-going operations and additional funding to address critical workforce needs are the System's highest priorities. However, supporting our neediest students is also imperative. For this reason, we support LD 761.

I would like to thank Representative Crockett for his tireless support of Maine's neediest students and his work to help Maine residents gain the education they need to become productive members in our current and future economy. A similar bill was under consideration in the 129th, with Chair Brennan as sponsor. The current version of this bill is consistent with the amended version of Chair Brennan's bill, considered by this committee last year. We had numerous conversations with Chair Brennan, as well as with Rep. Crockett, to assure we could meet our shared goal to establish a program that is scalable, sustainable, and targets those Pell eligible Maine students whose Federal and Maine State Grants do not cover the full cost of tuition and fees at Maine's community colleges.

The amount of \$3.6 million was chosen because it would provide MCCS' 7,200 Pell Grant recipient students with \$500 in additional aid, an amount that seemed reasonable in the current budget climate as well as enough to make a true difference to our students.

Students with significant financial need typically qualify for Federal and Maine State Grants, and, because our colleges offer the lowest college costs in New England, the grants they receive often cover the full cost of their tuition and fees. In fact, 49% of degree-seeking MCCS students received grant-based aid sufficient to cover their tuition and fees.

This bill would address those Pell eligible students whose grant awards do not cover the full cost of tuition and fees. At the same time, it might incentivize more Maine people to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and pursue higher education. Prior to the pandemic we knew that 38% of Maine high school graduates choose not to further their education, a decision that has increasingly negative consequences for them and for Maine.

The approach offered in LD 761 will provide students who have financial need the additional resources to cover tuition and fees, offering them the financial support that may allow them to enroll and persist in a community college. And, from there, great things can happen.

Thank you for your time and consideration.