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TO: Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
FROM: Becky Smith, Dir. Government and Community Relations, bsmith@mccs.me.edu
RE: Testimony in support of the MCCS portion of the sponsor's amendment to LD 334, *An Act To Help Maine Students Catch Up and Keep Up by Providing Remedial and Compensatory Assistance in Response to Education Disruption*
DATE: May 13, 2021

The students who have, or will, graduate during the COVID-19 pandemic have had to overcome obstacles we could not have envisioned 2 years ago. In addition to the lost opportunities for athletics, theater and just hanging out, many struggled to learn in a fully or mostly remote environment, and just tuned out. We hear from guidance counsellors that many of those students have lost the desire to continue their education and unfortunately, this may severely limit their future. These same students may also have had the added stress of illness, quarantine and even death in their family and neighborhoods.

On top of all of this, many families struggled economically. As we have stated in this committee before, incomes for families making over \$60,000 increased while the vast majority of those who lost their jobs are from the lowest paid jobs. The majority of students who enroll in Maine's community colleges are low- to moderate-income. Indeed, even though we offer the lowest tuition and fees of any college or university in New England, three-quarters of our full-time, degree-seeking students qualify to receive financial aid. As a result, we are especially sensitive to the financial challenges our students face and are appreciative of Representative Millett's interest in finding ways to further reduce those challenges, especially for Maine's most recent high school graduates.

It is our understanding, from conversations with the sponsor, that this bill creates a "last-dollar" grant for 2020 and 2021 graduates of Maine's high schools that would cover the cost of tuition not covered by other federal, state, and institutional grants. If this is the case, we estimate the fiscal impact of this initiative would be minimally \$11.4 million. This is a ballpark figure arrived at by taking the number of graduates from 2020 and the projected completers in 2021 and determining that the same percentage of those students would attend MCCS as have in the past few years (17.1%). Fully 55% of the recent HS graduates will likely receive enough Pell and Maine State Grant to cover their costs. That means, 45% or approximately 1,978 would qualify for this program. That number multiplied by 60 credit hours at \$96.00 each brings us to \$11.4 million.

However, there are variables that make this number less predictable. For instance, if this initiative does its job, we should see more than 17.1% of those students choose a "free" community college education for 2 years. Some who planned to attend other colleges or universities, may change their plans and hopefully, some of those who were not contemplating attending any college would give it a try.

Also, the Governor's proposed part two budget increases the Maine State Grant award—to \$2,500. This initiative, which we strongly supported when it was a stand-alone bill, would further decrease the financial need for those who qualify for the Maine State Grant.

This committee has time-and-time again shown your dedication to MCCS and our students, and for this we are grateful. Please know that we at MCCS are doing all we can to reach Maine's high school students and help them recognize that the types of learning we provide will re-energize them and set them on the path to success.

Thank you.