



The Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Testimony from Jason Judd, Executive Director, Educate Maine

In Support Of

L.D. 447: “An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by Providing Funds to Maine’s Community Colleges”

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am Jason Judd, the Executive Director of Educate Maine, a business-led education advocacy organization. In addition, we are one of the founders of the MaineSpark Coalition, the state attainment coalition focused on increasing adult education attainment to 60% by 2025 to address the needs of our economy. In order to reach this goal, we must make sure our learners are not only able to access and afford postsecondary education but are also able to complete their credentials of value or degrees.

This bill will help students who attend Maine’s Community Colleges to finish their degrees and be prepared to enter the Maine workforce. Although Maine has invested significantly in helping students enroll in community college programs, we must do more to help make sure students have the supports to persist from semester to semester and finish their degrees. These supports include high quality advising, tutoring, career guidance, and other necessary supports.

Great Schools Partnership recently released their 2022 Common Data Project report which includes essential indicators for high school and postsecondary education across New England. In Maine, the percent of students who attend postsecondary education in the fall directly after their high school graduation is 52.7% which is a 10% decline over the last five years. This rate is also 6% points below the New England average. We need to change this trend since the majority of jobs here in Maine require a credential of value or a degree. Unfortunately, the college persistence rates for Maine students are usually from 60% to 70%. These rates are usually lower for students in community college because of the incredible barriers these students face each day. This rate also means we are losing thousands of students each year from higher education who do not complete their first credential of value nor college degree. These students are not as prepared for the workforce as they could if they were able to finish their degrees or credentials of value. This bill could significantly help students in community college persist in their programs by providing much needed supports.

Although we completely support this particular investment in Maine’s Community Colleges, it is important to note how essential it is to invest in student supports for Maine’s other higher education institutions because they also face the same barriers with their students. I encourage the committee to not only support this bill but also discuss how we can expand support for students across our higher education community.

Thank you for your time. I am available for any questions.