

TESTIMONY OF BRENDAN MCQUADE
Ought to Pass—LD 512

An Act to Promote Student Enrollment and Degree Completion in the University of Maine System by Providing Tuition Waivers to Eligible Students

Submitted to the

Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

March 6, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and other members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to address the committee. My name is Brendan McQuade and I am an associate professor in the criminology department at the University of Southern Maine. I am here to testify in support of LD 512, *An Act to Promote Student Enrollment and Degree Completion in the University of Maine System by Providing Tuition Waivers to Eligible Students*.

I have been teaching at college-level since 2008, first as a graduate student and teaching assistant, and, since 2014, as full time faculty. During this time, I have taught at four institutions: Binghamton University, DePaul University, SUNY-Cortland, and the University of Southern Maine. Despite the different profiles of these institutions, students confront the same major problem. Due rising tuition costs, many students work full or part time and they simply do not have enough time to complete work required of a full time college student.

As a general guideline, it is recommended that students spend at least 2-3 hours of study time for every hour of class time. For example, if a student is taking a 3-credit hour course that meets for three hours per week, they should plan to spend an additional 6-9 hours per week outside of class studying and preparing for that course. The University of Maine System defines full time status as enrollment in four courses per semester. Many students take five classes a semester. This means 24 to 45 hours per work of studying and preparation in addition to 12 to 15 hours of class time. When we add the demands of personal circumstance and obligations to the expectation of full time college-level work, it is immediately clear that many students are in impossible time crunch. How is a student supposed to balance their course work with a full or part time job?

Many of them cannot manage. Administrators see this reality in declining enrollments and problems with student retention and completion. Every semester, I see the human face. Students breaking under the pressure of unrealistic demands and impossible time crunch. Some students are unable to complete the work and stop attending class. Other show up for class but struggle to complete the work and take incompletes, which many do not finish. Still others try to do the impossible and push themselves to the breaking point. Every semester, I have students breaking down in my office and opening up about the compounding pressures of study, work, and family obligations. The details are tragic: veteran students dealing with PTSD;

working parents trying to finish their degrees, while supporting a family and raising children; traditional students with significant responsibilities to care for younger siblings or aging or ill family members; students of all backgrounds dealing with disruption, death, and loss connected to COVID-19 or the opioid epidemic.

Often, there is little I can do for these students. I can and do refer students to resources available to them through the university for extra support of various kinds. I can and do offer to meet students outside of class time to help them work through the material or review assignments but it is often be hard for my students to find the time in their schedules. I can and do give generous extension and never hesitant to offer students incompletes. I can and do make these efforts but I cannot make college more affordable. There is nothing I can do address the underlying issue.

The legislature, however, can fix this problem. The tuition waivers proposed by LD 512 would reduce the financial burden on many students and allow them to focus on learning full time. Beyond the impact on individual students, this waiver program would help the State of Maine as whole in four key ways: (1) it would increase access to education and ensure that more Mainers have more options to access to the type of higher education that is appropriate for them, regardless of their economic background; (2) it would reducing student debt and allow graduates to start their careers without a large debt burden; (3) it would facilitate economic growth by creating a more skilled and educated workforce; (4) it would help increase social mobility by providing opportunities for students from low-income backgrounds to pursue higher education and improve their job prospects.

Please do the right thing and support higher education in Maine.