

Testimony of Simon West for The Maine State Chamber of Commerce In Support of
L.D. 447 An Act to Support Higher Education in Maine by Providing Funds to Maine's
Community Colleges

Chairs Rafferty and Brennan, and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Simon West. I reside in Gardiner and I represent the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, a statewide business association made up of both large and small businesses, here to provide you with my testimony in support of continued funding for the operation of Maine's Community College System.

As a founding member of MaineSpark, the Maine State Chamber of Commerce supports LD447 and the funding to continue operations at Maine's Community Colleges. MaineSpark is a group of stakeholders from business, education, and government driven organizations. The core mission is to ensure that, by 2025, 60% of Mainers have a degree or certificate of value that positions them with workforce credentials that will help them obtain career success.

The Community College System has been a critical partner in both crafting and obtaining the goal of 60% by 2025. In 2019, several years after MaineSpark was founded, the percentage of Maine's population with some form of certificate of value was 46%. Today the goal is nearly accomplished. As we get closer to the finish line there must not lose sight of the work that must still be done.

The Maine State Chamber of Commerce and MaineSpark support LD447 for the instrumental role the Community College System has played in closing the gap on the 60% mark. The coalition is dedicated to meeting this objective because of the real threat that structural unemployment poses on our Maine's economy. While seasonal and frictional unemployment are a typical symptom of economic forces, structural unemployment, the mismatch of available skills to meet the demands of available job openings, generates concerns within economists about economic stability and business contraction. I ask that you support LD447 and help fight structural unemployment while our great state continues to explore new ways of attracting and retaining talent to ease our workforce challenges.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with our testimony.