

Good afternoon,

My name is Molly LeBlanc and I am from Howland Maine, which is in Penobscot County. I am writing today as I will be unable to attend in person due to being at work. Growing up I thought my family was well off. We always had new school clothes, the sports equipment we needed, and food on the table every night. As I got older I came to the realization that my three siblings and I were taken care of because my parents worked countless hours, multiple jobs, and would often have to take out small loans in order for us to have the things we needed. I also realized I was not alone. So many of my peers and their families worked so hard to get what they needed just to get by. Great work ethic is something I am very thankful my parents instilled in me. My three sisters and I all had jobs by our senior year in high school in order to save up for vehicles. We also pay for our college ourselves. My parents often feel guilty that they are not able to afford to put us through schooling, however they remind us how important it is to have a trade or a degree in order to advance our adult careers. They have always been so helpful and supportive, however as a young adult in my first two years of college I had to have two jobs and go to school full time just to be able to afford to attend. I am currently a senior in the Social work program, and I am thankful that I had to work hard to get to where I am at. It gave me drive to work harder and it made me thankful for every opportunity my school had for myself. However, I am still over \$40,000 in debt because of school on top of having to pay on average \$5,000 per semester out of pocket. I like to think of myself as a hard worker and I am very blessed in life however the financial stress that school has put on me took a severe toll on my mental health. I faced many days where I would contemplate giving up; questioning if it was worth it. I often wonder about all the amazing people out there that were not as fortunate as I am, and have had to drop out/not attend school due to the financial hardships. There could potentially be amazing social workers, nurses, engineers etc. out there but won't ever know that due to not being able to go to school. I am here to give you all a perspective of a small, limited resourced town girl who could among many others be greatly benefited by the decisions made today. Thank you for your time and I hope you think of people like me, and those who could possibly have great impact in the future when making your final decisions.

Best wishes,

Molly LeBlanc