

April 15, 2015

Senator Brian Langley, Chair  
Representative Victoria Kornfield, Chair  
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
Maine State Legislature  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

### **Testimony in Favor of LD 1220, An Act To Increase Funding for the Maine Community College System**

Dear Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

The Maine Center for Economic Policy urges you to support LD 1220. This legislation will help Maine's low-income and working adults prepare for better-paying jobs that will allow them to support themselves and their families.

Maine is not adequately preparing our workforce. Unable to afford college, workers lack the credentials that businesses are looking for when hiring. They face a lifetime of low wages, financial struggles, and an inability to advance their career and financial security. With ill-prepared workers, our economy suffers.

Fifty-seven percent of Maine's college-bound high school seniors enroll in one of our public institutions<sup>1</sup>—either a campus of the University of Maine System (UMS), Maine Community College System (MCCS), or Maine Maritime Academy (MMA). Yet, Maine has cut per student state funding for public higher education by 16 percent since 2008,<sup>2</sup> while costs have continued to rise. To make up the difference, Maine students pay more in tuition and fees. And they take on debt, which forces them to delay major decisions such as buying a house, opening a new business, or starting a family further depressing Maine's economy.

Maine needs to invest in its students and adult workforce now.

Research<sup>3</sup> shows that the most affordable public education systems (those that graduate students with the lowest debt) have three things in common: 1) robust financial aid for low-

income students; 2) tuition and costs that are less than 25 percent of average family income; and 3) a low-priced college option for low-income residents. Maine fails all three of these tests.

The legislature has cut the State of Maine Grant Program by 21 percent over the past ten years.<sup>4</sup> As the program now stands, \$1,000 per student per year is available, well short of the \$5,500 recommended for full-time students. The average yearly cost to attend the University of Maine was \$17,820 in 2013 compared to \$11,767 using the recommended metric of 25% of average family income.<sup>5</sup> The average tuition and fees for community college, while representing just 7.2 percent of median household income,<sup>6</sup> limit access, especially in high-demand programs, due to stagnant appropriations.

Maine's economy, rocked by the shift from manufacturing to services, has fallen behind the region and the nation. An increasing number of new jobs require post-secondary education or an advanced degree, yet the percentage of young Mainers with a two- or four-year degree lags the rest of the country.<sup>7</sup> Ensuring affordability and access will help students matriculate, graduate, and participate fully in our economy. That will boost prosperity both for individuals and the state as a whole.

For these reasons, I urge you to support LD 1220. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Garrett Martin  
Executive Director

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<sup>1</sup> David Silvernail, James Sloan, and Amy Johnson. College participation rates of Maine's high school graduates: examining the claims, March 2013. Available at:

<http://usm.maine.edu/sites/default/files/cepare/College%20Participation%20Rates%20for%20Maine.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Phil Oloff et al., Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: Recent deep state higher education cuts may hurt students and the economy for years to come. See Figure 1, "Percent change in state funding per student, inflation adjusted." Available at: <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=3927>.

<sup>3</sup> National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. Losing Ground: A National Status Report on the Affordability of American Higher Education, 2002. Available at:

[http://www.highereducation.org/reports/losing\\_ground/ar.shtml](http://www.highereducation.org/reports/losing_ground/ar.shtml).

<sup>4</sup> Maine Legislature. Final Report of the Commission to Study College Affordability and College Completion, December 9, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> 2013 UMS Annual Financial Report, page 8, "Student Comprehensive Cost of Education," available at <http://www.maine.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/FINAL-2013-Annual-Financial-Report-merged-11-20-2013.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> New England Board of Higher Education. Public Tuition and Fees in New England, April 2014. Available at [http://www.nebhe.org/info/pdf/policy/NEBHE\\_Tuition\\_and\\_Fees\\_Report\\_2014\\_FINAL\\_revised\\_April\\_2014.pdf](http://www.nebhe.org/info/pdf/policy/NEBHE_Tuition_and_Fees_Report_2014_FINAL_revised_April_2014.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Young Mainers (age 25-34) with a degree is 37.7 percent in Maine vs. 40.0 percent in the U.S according to the Lumina Foundation. Closing the Gaps in College Attainment, A Stronger Nation through Higher Education, 2014.