



**State of the Maine Community College System**

Address to the 128<sup>th</sup> Maine Legislature  
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President Thibodeau, Speaker Gideon, members of the 128<sup>th</sup> Legislature, Chancellor Page, President Brennan, and guests: Good morning and thank you for inviting me to be here with you.

When I was asked to serve as president of our community college system two years ago, I too saw the opportunity for greater collaboration between our colleges, the public universities and Maine Maritime. We have devoted significant attention to that priority and are proud of what we have accomplished.

I want to thank Chancellor Page for his leadership as we have worked to increase opportunities for transfer, create clear academic pathways, and share the administrative best practices that can produce efficiencies and savings for both our systems.

And I want to thank President Brennan, who has worked to strengthen Maine Maritime Prep, and to enable our students to transfer into his highly regarded international business logistics and marine sciences programs.

Together, our three institutions share the common goal of providing Maine people with the education they need to pursue meaningful, rewarding lives and careers. But, separately, we serve very distinct purposes.

Our two-year colleges have deep roots in technical and occupational education. When I started with our System in 1994 as its general counsel, our institutions were small technical colleges. When the 121<sup>st</sup> Legislature transformed us into community colleges in 2003, the scope of our work was expanded to enable more people affordable access to higher education.

It worked.

Since then our enrollment has more than doubled to over 17,000 students; we have awarded nearly 30,000 certificates or degrees; and hundreds of our students now transfer each year into the University system to continue their education.

Despite our growth, our mission has stayed the same: to create an educated, skilled and adaptable labor force that is responsive to the changing needs of the Maine economy.

We continue to take that mission very seriously.

We offer nearly 300 program options in one- and two-year trade, technical, and occupational areas of study. Seventy-five percent of our programs are the only ones of their kind in our state. We actively ensure that our programs remain relevant and responsive; in the past two years alone, we have modified, added, or discontinued over 75 program options to better align them with the needs of Maine employers.

For some of our students, our more affordable pathway to transfer is their goal. But for nearly two-thirds, their goal is to enroll in our trade, occupational and technical programs. Plumbers, firefighters, nurses, medical assistants, electricians and computer technicians: the list goes on.

It is clear that the Maine economy needs our graduates. Researchers tell us that by 2020, 66% of all Maine jobs will require post-secondary education. Currently, only 39% of adults in Maine have a college credential. We have a long way to go to make sure that Maine people and their employers have the skills they need in a changing economy.

The community colleges meet this need through the four pathways that we provide: industry specific training, one-year certificates, two-year degrees, and an affordable and assured transfer pathway to a bachelor's degree.

A decade ago, many of our students would not have believed that a college credential was possible. For example:

- Nearly 50% will be the first in their family to earn a college degree
- Over 75% of our full-time, degree-seeking students require financial aid;
- More than a third of our students work at least 30 hours a week while going to school;
- The average age of our degree-seeking students is 26; and
- Over 25% have children at home.

Against these challenges, our colleges offer Maine people the most affordable access to higher education. Our tuition and fees average \$3,600 annually for a full-time student; the lowest in New England and the lowest in Maine by at least half.

If we are to strengthen Maine's economy, we need to keep our education accessible.

- 93% of our students come from Maine;
- 93% of our students commute to their local campus; and
- 92% of our graduates stay in Maine.

These facts tell us those who enroll in our colleges are looking to stay in Maine; stay in their communities; and build a future in their communities. Small business owners, computer repair technicians, police officers, heavy equipment operators, early childhood educators, precision

machinists. Again, the list goes on and, as it does, I am reminded why we call our institutions *community colleges*.

The benefits that our colleges provide to our students and our state are substantial:

- The average first-year, full-time wage for an MCCS associate degree holder is \$34,000;
- Over the course of their lifetime, associate degree holders typically earn \$423,000 more than those with just a high school diploma; and
- And when our graduates go on to earn a baccalaureate degree, their additional lifetime earnings are projected to increase by another half million dollars.

While we are proud of our colleges' important contributions to date, we fully understand that we cannot operate with business as usual. Rapid changes in the Maine economy require those of us in higher education to develop new delivery models so that Maine people and businesses are better able to get the skills they need, when they need them. For example:

- We are working with industries that have “off-seasons,” like hospitality and construction, to deliver our education and training during compressed semesters at those slower times of the year;
- We are working on innovative ways to move individuals from our non-credit and short-term training into more credit-bearing credentials and degrees;
- And we are strengthening how we assess a student's prior learning—whether through military service or another structured experience—so that those individuals can obtain their credential as quickly and affordably as possible.

The budget that my Trustees recommended this session seeks to continue this important work. The recommendation has three parts:

- First, a modest increase in base funding to cover ongoing operations. This requested increase is less than in previous years.
- Second, funding to enable us to provide more workplace training. Businesses of all kinds, from all over the state, have spoken to us clearly about this urgent need.
- And finally, a modest bond request for classroom and lab equipment and facility weatherization to achieve long-term savings. If approved, this would be our first bond in four years.

Our Trustees made these requests against this history. Since 2001, general fund appropriations as a percentage of our revenues have declined from 50% to 34%. During this same period, our two largest cost drivers -- retirement and health insurance -- have increased by 150% and 104% respectively. And it was also during this time that our enrollment nearly doubled.

In spite of these pressures, I am proud to report that our financial position remains sound. We do not deficit spend, and we continue to balance our books each year within the resources available to us. But we must have our base budget if we are to keep our existing programs.

And, at the same time, if we are to heed the clarion call from employers for more trained workers, we must fund the Trustees' strategic approach to advance our workforce development efforts. Under this approach:

- We can expand over a dozen occupational programs in areas such as computer science, health care, and the trades in order to meet employer needs and student demands;
- We can strengthen and expand our workforce training across the state. We currently provide continuing education and workplace training to over 6,000 Mainers and more than 130 employers each year, but our employers justifiably want and need us to do more; and
- And we can strengthen and expand our efforts to graduate more students more quickly. To date, all of work in this area has been entirely grant funded, and approximately 50% of students who come to our colleges right out of high school require remediation in writing or math. We are pleased that we have begun to make progress on this issue, but we still need to do much more, and I look forward to continuing my work with Bob Hasson at the Department of Education on this and other important issues.

State funding our student support efforts will also enable us to leverage in particular the \$800,000 grant that we recently received from the Kresge Foundation. We take considerable pride in Kresge's careful finding that, through the work of the Maine Community College System, "Maine is poised to become a national leader in demonstrating how low-income, first generation and under-represented students can succeed in college."

We couldn't agree more.

As we request these strategic investments in order to better serve more Maine people and more Maine businesses, we thank the Administration for the initial support that they provided in their budget submission, and we look forward to working with the Appropriations Committee as they review that submission. We also will continue to work hard to secure support from other sources. For nearly ten years now, our Foundation for Maine's Community Colleges has been a key partner, with the funds that they raise going primarily to scholarships, the piloting of temporary student support programs, new educational technologies, and facility improvements.

The list is too long to recite all who have contributed to this effort, but I want to make special mention of Leon and Lisa Gorman, who had the vision to create a statewide foundation to support the critical role that our colleges play in our state's economic well-being.

That Mr. Gorman would share so many benefits of his own journey with those just starting theirs is indeed one of the finest tributes that stature has ever paid to kindness. And that Mrs. Gorman would continue this generosity after Mr. Gorman's passing has had a profound impact on our work.

Our other key supporters of our Foundation include many Maine's largest employers and foundations. They recognize the critical role that our colleges play in Maine's economy and

workforce; they recognize that advancing the economic opportunity of Maine people is a collective effort; and such an effort that requires the ongoing commitment of both our public and private sectors. Strength always lies in such diversity.

Indeed, my friend Bill Brennan is a scientist, my friend Jim Page is a mathematician, and I am an attorney. In many ways, our backgrounds complement and inform how we each approach our work. I know that, for my part, I am drawn time and again to my roots in the law, particularly constitutional law, and so I close with these two thoughts.

First, I recall the scholar who wrote in 1978 that legislative policy debates should refer more often to our founding frameworks, to our constitutions, because the very deliberate language of our constitutions reminds us of the core principles to which we have commonly committed, and it is those common commitments that best advance the opportunity for moral and civic education in our lives.

Article 8 of the Maine Constitution expressly recognizes that the “advantages of education are essential to the preservation of the rights and liberties of the people.” There is no question about the advantages of employment-centered education, or that the rights and liberties of our people include meaningful access to the economic and social opportunity that our programs provide.

Second, I think of the former U.S. Supreme Court Justice who observed in 2010 that the most difficult decisions in government require choices -- not between those things that are good and those things that are evil -- but between those things that we all agree have value. Indeed, one decision among many that you will have to make this session is not whether to educate our workforce or whether to strengthen our communities, but how to meaningfully prioritize both so that we don't risk losing either.

That same Justice also said that when it comes to making the difficult decisions in government, we should choose -- not on the basis of measurement -- but on the basis of meaning.

The meaning of our work at the community colleges is clear.

Our students come to us with the fewest of privileges. They don't want a government service, and they don't want just a job. They want a career, and they want to earn it for themselves.

Increasingly, they choose to come to us because our programs are local, affordable and they lead promptly to a defined career. They know that our colleges offer them the first, best, and -- for many -- only chance to stay in, and give back to, the communities where they live; the communities that you represent; the communities that define the very character of our state.

That is the meaning of our work: to provide the essential opportunity to better one's life through the dignity and prosperity of gainful employment. That meaning runs to the bedrock of our economy. It runs to the vitality of our businesses, cities and towns. And it runs to the moral commitment that a thoughtful government makes to its aspiring people.

Thank you.