

Proposal: Providing Two Years of Free Community College for Students Most Impacted by the Pandemic

To help Maine students whose aspirations for higher education may have been impacted by the pandemic, Governor Mills is proposing \$20 million in one-time General fund dollars to provide up to two years of free community college for all students from the high school graduating classes of 2020 through 2023.

To qualify, students must enroll full-time at a Maine Community College, earning 30 credits per year, towards a two-year associate degree or a one-year certificate, and qualify for in-state tuition or commit to living and working in Maine.

Both new and current community college students are eligible, with students from the classes of 2020 and 2021 who are already enrolled in a two-year program or one-year certificate eligible to receive funding to cover their remaining course of study. Current students may increase their pace of study (e.g. from part-time to fulltime) and/or apply for matriculation in order to meet eligibility criteria.

Students from the classes of 2020, 2021 and 2022 must enroll or be enrolled in the fall of 2022. Students from the class of 2023 must enroll in the fall of 2023. Students must also first accept any grants or other scholarships awarded to them, with the last dollar costs of tuition and mandatory fees being covered. Funding will remain in effect until the student has completed their associate degree or one-year certificate program, so long as they remain enrolled on a full-time basis within the Maine Community College System.

Approximately 8,000 young Maine people are expected to benefit from this program and earn a credential of value unburdened by the debt of tuition and mandatory fees and ready to enter the workforce. As college graduates, they will have higher earning power, enter a career track faster, be more “recession-proof,” and earn significantly more money over their careers than high school graduates. Many of these students will enter the workforce in their early 20s, now with high value degrees and certificates and with specialized skills and abilities in high-demand areas.

If approved, as soon as this fall and on an ongoing basis, the Maine Community College System is expected to deliver a report to the Administration evaluating the program’s uptake and effectiveness with recommendations about its future.