

April 6, 2015

Dear Maine Legislators,

My name is Joseph Buzzell and I am currently finishing my final year at Central High School as a senior in the class of 2015. Throughout my years at Central, I have taken academic, honors, and AP classes and have secured myself the position as the senior valedictorian for 2015. I also take part in 95% of the clubs my school offers and lead 72% of them in some form or another. Now, as my senior year comes to a close, I am completing the college application process and am expected to know where I am going to go to college by May 1st. However, this question has been one of the hardest in my life. Being such a high achieving student in my school has gotten me recognition and acceptances to many different colleges throughout New England. But my decision doesn't come down to what college I would like to go to, but what college can I afford.

I, like many other student's in the state of Maine, am a first generation college student in my family. I will be the first person in my family with a college degree and hopefully a graduate degree by the year 2023. I, however, like many other Maine students, have an EFC of zero. My mother makes just over \$14,000 a year. Because of this reality, I attend the TRIO Upward Bound Math and Science program at the University of Maine, a program dedicated to aiding first generation, low income students wishing to pursue a college education. Together, we have collaborated and crunched the numbers to see where I am most suited to go to college financially. The University of Maine cost, including room and board cost is about \$24,000 per school year, excluding other fees. My financial aid package included only \$17,000 in grants and scholarships leaving me with a \$7,000 plus gap every year I attend UMaine. If you remember, this also equates to about half of my mother's annual income. That is \$28,000 over a four year undergraduate program in which I will have to come up with out of my own pocket either in loans through UMaine or outside sources. This debt doesn't even include the tuition loans I need to take out for veterinary school.

The University of Maine is one of four colleges I am contemplating. In comparison, it remains to be the least expensive out of pocket but still seems to be a far reach for my attendance. If LD 627 were to pass, increasing the Maine State Grant, college in Maine would seem much more attainable. Closing the gap that students have to pay out of their pockets in any way is a step towards making college available to all no matter what their financial status. It would also mean that students like me who want to pursue a graduate degree do not graduate from their four year programs in more debt than necessary. Student's should be allowed to attend a college based on what they are capable of. Finances shouldn't hold a student back from their greatest potential and I believe that LD 627 can be the solution.

Sincerely,

Joseph Buzzell
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