

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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To: Hillary Risler, Legislative Analyst, Office of Policy and Legal Analysis
From: Becky Smith, Director of Government and Community Relations,
Maine Community College System, (207) 629-4015, bsmith@mccs.me.edu
RE: Information pertaining to LD 155, An Act to Ensure Transparency in College Costs

During the first session of the 129th Legislature, your committee considered LD 155, *An Act to Ensure Transparency in College Costs*. The Committee determined that legislative action was not warranted but asked that the Maine Community College System provide your committee with the financial aid award letters used at our seven colleges. You will find those letters attached to this memo. However, it is important to note that each college also communicates college and program costs in person, on the phone, via email and using online tools where students (and prospective students) can enter information about their enrollment plans and generate individual cost estimates. As an example of the type of information generally included with the financial aid award letters at all of the colleges, I have included the materials sent by Central Maine Community College. I am also including below links to the content on each college's financial aid websiteⁱ.

We are very up-front about the charges students will accrue throughout their education. We know that many of our students budget very tightly and need to know their financial picture as soon as possible. Our website has valuable and easy to read information just one click from our front pageⁱⁱ. We believe it is our responsibility to demystify costs when discussing college to prospective students and we take that responsibility very seriously.

As I sought to prepare this memo, I received information from the Financial Aid officers from each of our colleges. What was clear in their thoughtful responses was that the financial aid, admissions and billing office staff work diligently to assure that our students fully understand the true costs of the coursework they have chosen, including any course fees that are over and above the general college costs. It is important to note that matriculating students do not choose their specific courses at the time of college acceptance, so course fees cannot be included in the initial award letter.

The Directors also meet system-wide on a regular basis to share best practices. Simplifying financial aid/cost information is a frequent and ongoing topic of discussion at those meetings. They are also actively collaborating on ways to assure students understand the grants available, and the difference between subsidized and unsubsidized loans and how to assure students are receiving all the aid for which they are eligible.

As the Maine Community College System explores more ways we can standardize systems (HR, IT etc.) across our seven colleges we are also exploring the option of one, standard financial aid award document that will be used at all colleges for each student. I will keep your committee apprised of our progress.

I believe this quote from one of our Financial Aid Directors sums up the attitude of all respondents: “Becky, please let me know if you have other questions, or if you need expanded responses to your questions above. This is such an important issue for our students and their families; we must strive to provide as much transparency as possible so that they will make their best decisions when attending college here in Maine.”

ⁱ CMMC: <https://www.cmcc.edu/admissions-aid/paying-for-college/cost-of-attendance/>
EMCC: <https://www.emcc.edu/admissions/paying-for-college/tuition-fees/>
KVCC: <https://www.kvcc.me.edu/admissions-financial-aid/tuition-aid/tuition-fees/>
NMCC: <https://www.nmcc.edu/admissions-financial-aid/paying-college/tuition-fees/>
SMCC: <https://www.smcme.edu/admissions-aid/tuition-fees/>
WCCC: <https://www.wccc.me.edu/admissions-aid/finances/tuition-fees/>
YCCC: <https://www.yccc.edu/admissions-aid/paying-college/tuition-fees/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.mccs.me.edu/admissions-tuition-aid/tuition-aid/tuition-fees/>