

Julian Moran, P.O. box 332, Cornish, Maine 04020.

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The Honorable Governor Janet Mills, 1 State House Station, Augusta, Maine, 04333.

Dear Governor Mills,

I am an undergraduate psychology student at the University of Southern Maine, graduating this semester. I am writing you asking for your support in maintaining and providing additional beneficial changes to the Opportunity Maine Tax Credit.

The increasing cost of higher education in our country, is causing Americans to second guess pursuing getting any. Our citizens are now put in the position where they have to make a choice between going to college, at the price of having to deal with the stress and challenges of the debts associated with it, or not pursuing higher education, and be put at a disadvantage in regards to employment opportunities and advancement. It has been well established that people with more education live longer, healthier lives. They have more ambition, autonomy, find more satisfaction in their jobs, living situations, communities, families, are more engaged in their communities, become more informed voters, and are less likely to engage in criminal activities. Having a more educated population could translate into better decisions being made throughout our social structures, which could lead towards us living in a more functional, healthier, and happier society. Receiving a higher education does not only help the individuals getting the education, it also benefits our economy and the wellbeing of our nation as a whole.

Maine currently has the oldest population in the country. In order to sustain it's economy, it needs to attract a younger work force. The Opportunity Maine Tax Credit derived out of a citizens initiative in 2007 by an organization called 'Opportunity Maine'. In order to encourage people to live and work in Maine, the program reimburses qualifying higher education graduates of their loan payments; with a monthly benchmark of \$74 (associate degrees), \$377 (bachelor degrees), and \$328 (master degrees). The program offers a refundable tax credit for associate degrees, and for STEM (Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields of bachelors degrees.

Although the Opportunity Maine Tax Credit is a great program, it does have some limitations. For one, the program currently does not offer any refundable tax credit for non STEM bachelor degrees, or for master degrees. Another issue is that college graduation does not guarantee an instant increase in income, and low income college graduates may not have \$377 a month to pay back school loans. To eliminate these difficulties, I propose that the state government pay back the school loans (to the \$377 cap) to the lenders directly. This amendment would abolish the non-refundable limitations for non-STEM fields, increase the cap for master degrees, as well as solve the loan payment budget issues that recent graduates may have.

Most importantly, there are currently no guarantees that The Opportunity Maine Tax Credit will remain. I thus urge you to sign legislation to keep the program active for decades to come, as to maintain and keep on attracting an educated workforce into our great state.

Please let me know how you feel about this issue and feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions.

Thank you, Julian Moran.