

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Marty Zanghi and I am from University of Southern Maine's Muskie School of Public Service and I am here today to testify on LD 215, An Act to Improve Student Retention in Maine's Postsecondary Institutions. I want to share with you my thoughts on this bill from the perspective of a person who has worked very closely with public, private organizations and youth for over 15 years to improve opportunities and resources for youth in Maine's foster care and juvenile justice systems. I live in South Portland and have two kids in college and one in high school. The issue of education success that been both a personal and professional passion of mine for some time.

This past year, in cooperation with the Mitchell Institute and the Maine Office of Child and Family Services we commissioned a very small study examining the College Enrollment and Completion trends for youth in Maine's foster care system between the years of 2003-2013. The findings are very consistent with almost every national study done on educational outcomes for youth in foster care.

But before I review a couple of key data points, I want you to take a moment to think back to 2003 and what you might have been doing back then and what you and your family members may have accomplished since 2003. In 2003 the Governor was John Baldacci, Speaker of the House was Patrick Colwell from Gardner and the Senate President was Beverly Dagget from Augusta. The New England Patriots had just won their second Super Bowl and the Boston Red Sox still had not won the World Series. In case you are wondering Maine Boys Division A Basketball Finals saw Bangor defeating Cheverus and Girls had McCauley victorious over Nokomis (I have the other Division results if you are interested)

**Between the years 2003 to 2013 there were a total of 1,800 youth in the Maine's foster care system that turned 18. Out of those 1,800 youth only 47 ever earned a college degree by May 2014 (on average just under 5 per a year). That is a total of 2.6% of the eligible youth. Which is consistent with many national studies (Pecora, Courtney). Sadly over 31% of the students that did enroll, left by the end of their first semester (22% completed only one semester 9% withdrew before the end of the first semester).**

Recently I read the following in a blog by a former youth in foster care and it left me a little sad and empty but it also made me think of youth in foster care in Maine and our country who have tried to be successful by pursuing a college degree and failed. It's called The Voiceless in a Failing System (1/24/15 Huffington Post Blog by Matt Hartman).

"Rather than focus on the successes of youth in the system, we need to focus on the failures. We need more of the youth who are homeless, who are in jail and who lack even a high school diploma to speak out. While you may call me a "success," I am not a success of the system. Rather than focus on me in the present, we need to focus on the failures -- the 13-year-old me -- because those are what really define foster care. The successes are not a reflection of a successful system, rather they're a reflection of luck in a failing system".

Finally, because of your leadership and support for this legislation Maine will begin to change the course on the number of youth in foster care who do not succeed. We can and will get better results.

Respectfully Submitted  
Marty Zanghi 3/4/15