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The State of Maine is steadily aging and fails to retain young people who are of working age. The aging population of Maine affects not only the state’s economic growth, but also the state’s ability to provide necessary aid and services to its residents. According to data collected by the US Census Bureau in 2017, the median age of individuals in the state of Maine is 44.3. With a median age seven years above that of the national average (37.7), Maine is the oldest state in the union. Vermont, with a median age of 42.6 is the second-oldest state in the union, followed closely by New Hampshire and West Virginia, with median ages of 42.5 and 42.0, respectively.

Maine’s aging population presents issues in a number of areas including economic growth, care for elderly persons, workforce retention and growth, and stimulation of new ideas and initiatives. The abstract nature of this issue (youth retention) lends itself to a variety of solutions, all of which are necessary to properly address the problem. In lieu of presenting a variety of solutions to a complicated issue, I have chosen instead to focus on one solution, with

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an in-depth analysis of policy that may work to effectively implement this solution in the state of Maine.

An exploration of Maine’s efforts to bolster youth retention showed that work is being done in a variety of areas. Cultural, economic, and educational research is being done to, with hopes of implementing programs encouraging young people to settle in Maine. During my research for this policy memo, I had conversations with individuals working in both the housing and educational sector of Maine’s workforce. An individual employed by Penquis Housing informed me that individuals in that state suffer not from lack of opportunity statewide, but from a lack of diversity of opportunity in more rural areas. Additionally, I was me that though many urbanized areas often offer welcoming and accepting communities, rural areas often struggle to offer the same. Because of this, young people often settle in cities such as Portland or Bangor. Though this is beneficial for the cities in question, rural areas are often more in need of population growth and increase in opportunity.

Further research regarding housing and community dynamics in rural Maine led me to investigate educational opportunities throughout the state. It was through this portion of my research that I discovered the Opportunity Maine Tax Credit. This credit, previously unknown to me, drew my interest. From the perspective of a student currently finishing a four-year degree, it seems that economic advantage is often what draws individuals out of Maine after graduation. Because of this, my policy proposal focuses on explanation and promotion of the Opportunity Maine Tax Credit in high schools and colleges statewide.

**Policy Proposal:**

Simplify the language of the Opportunity Maine Tax Credit³, making it more accessible to individuals working in the State of Maine. Along with this, create a dialogue among students

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about the benefit of this tax credit, thereby promoting conversation about the economic benefits of remaining in Maine.

**Approaches/Programs:**

- Provide college students with information about the tax credit prior to their graduation from school, allowing them to seek assistance while university and college resources (advising, professors, career assistance offices, etc.) are still available to them.

- Employ individuals to work as outreach and advocacy professionals. These individuals would be tasked with travelling to colleges, universities, and high schools statewide to host informational sessions and workshops explaining and promoting this tax credit. Have these individuals provide assistance with filling out the Educational Opportunity Tax Credit worksheet, if possible. Explain the opportunities available to workers in different sectors.

- Provide college and university recruiters and admissions teams with informational handouts about the tax credit and its benefits to Maine graduates. Encourage these individuals to provide this information to students and parents interested in Maine schools, including those coming from outside of Maine.

- Provide high school juniors and seniors (along with their parents, teachers, and advisors) with information about the tax credit. Host informational sessions (if necessary) for students and parents, explaining the benefits of attending school in Maine and working in the state after graduation.

- Request the help of individuals who have benefitted from the tax credit. Have these individuals speak to the assistance provided to them by this credit. Create informational videos using real-life stories, to be posted on the Opportunity Maine website.
Works Cited:

