To: The Office of Governor Janet Mills  
From: Mariah Langton, Maine Policy Scholar,  
The University of Maine at Farmington 18-19  
Subject: TRIO Programs on The University of Maine System Campuses

Issue: By definition, first-generation college students are students in college degree programs who do not have a parent that has a four-year degree. These students made up 44.0% of the Fall 2018 incoming students. This is almost half of the entering student body, and yet, many of these students are still struggling throughout their college career. This is due to a variety of reasons that are closely related to being a first-generation college student. To combat these issues and to help these students, each Umaine system campus, excluding the University of Maine at Machias, has a TRIO program, usually under the name of Student Support Services, on campus. They are available for first-generation college students to take part in throughout their college career.

TRIO is a federally funded program that President Lyndon B. Johnson started that help students from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as first-generation students, obtain a college degree. TRIO Support Services offer a variety of resources including free tutoring, mentoring, and other programs that vary from campus to campus. However, TRIO programs are limited in funding and on how many students they can serve. Due to this, many first-generation students still struggle due to their inability to access these programs and the resources they offer, or if they are in the programs, the resources that are available may vary due to a lack of funding.

First-generation students, as I mentioned before, face many challenges that other students are less likely to. Many of these issues steam from financial and familial issues. Often times, these students experience something called “Achievement Guilt” which is when a student feels guilty for being at college getting an education that their other families did not get to experience. This could lead to students feeling like they need to minimize their academic success when it comes to talking to family members. This could also pertain to the guilt first-generation students who are also low-income, which is usually more than half of the students. For instance, at the University of Maine at Augusta, their TRIO program serves 360 students, 63% of whom are both first-generation and low-income. They feel achievement guilt on a different level because they often feel guilty that they are not contributing as much to the household while they are away at school.
However, the biggest issue these students face is financial. Almost 25% of first-generation students surveyed at the University of Maine at Farmington work multiple jobs on top of taking classes\textsuperscript{1}. Students surveyed identified financial issues and trouble paying for school as one of their biggest stressors. If we want these students to succeed, and we do when you consider that they make up close to half of all students in the public university system, then we need to provide both them and the TRIO programs with more support.

**Maine Policies in Place Today:**

Currently, there is only one policy that relates directly to first-generation students. The law, 20-A §10013 is a requirement that all schools in the University of Maine System and the Community College system submit a yearly report that summarizes data such as graduation rates compared to those students that are not first-generation. This law also required the schools to report on what services they provided to the students, such as tutors, peer mentors, or financial advising. In regards to that, the programs must come up with a plan to raise first-generation graduation and enrollment rates.

\textsuperscript{1} Hinkley, Brianna, et al. (2019)
While it is not a law or a policy, National First-Generation Student day is celebrated on November 8th every year. At the University of Maine at Farmington, we had our 3rd annual First-Gen Celebration. This is a full-day event where both non-first-generation students and first-generation students can learn more about first-generation students by sharing their college journey story, creating collaborative art displays, and a variety of other events throughout campus. It is a day that brings awareness to those students that often go unnoticed and unrecognized for how they power through the daily struggles they face.

Other than this law, there is no policy on the state-level that focuses on first-generation students, which shows how invisible they can be, not only to the college campus but to the state as well. There are plenty of policies that apply to the entire UMaine system, but as mentioned earlier, these students are at a disadvantage. They need support systems that are supported financially and they need to feel supported and valued by the campus and by the state.

**Recommendations:**

- Allot additional funding for the University of Maine System specifically for first-generation students. This money should go to expanding support services such as peer mentors that are offered to all first-generation students, not only the students that are in TRIO programs.
- Recognize First-Generation Day in the state of Maine. This will bring more awareness to this group of students and hopefully encourage campuses to celebrate/recognize the day in various ways, possibly following the University of Maine at Farmington’s tradition.
- Focus more on National TRIO day, which is February 28th. While TRIO programs from across the state have a set up in the State House around that day in the Hall of Flags, attendance from Legislators has not been great in the past. If there is more talk about the importance of this day and meeting the people that are there for TRIO day from across the state, more legislators may become aware of the importance of this subgroup of students.
• Create a subcommittee in the Education department that focuses on first-generation students. This subcommittee would not only be for college students. Rather, they would focus on children from preschool up throughout college in order to make sure that they are receiving the support they need which may include more access to TRIO programs throughout the state.
Works Cited
