



**Remarks of Gregory W. Powell  
Harold Alfond Foundation**

**Maine Community College System Press Conference**

*Announcement of the Harold Alfond Center for the  
Advancement of Maine's Workforce*

**Southern Maine Community College  
Tuesday, October 5, 2021, 10:00 am**

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Thank you, Governor McKernan, Governor Mills, President Daigler, President Fitzsimmons. Wonderful to be here with you and to be live streaming, too!

This morning, on behalf of the Harold Alfond Foundation, I'd like to share some thoughts on the vital importance of Maine's Community College System to the future of Maine and to make an announcement.

Harold Alfond envisioned a future where all Mainers could thrive, from birth through career. He thought that quality, relevant, and accessible education for all our people, not just some, is as vital to enriching lives and community as it is to growing a prosperous economy. The two go hand in hand.

Today, in the wake of a Pandemic and the challenges of wealth and income inequality upon us, Harold's Foundation is committed to that vision as never before. And, as never before, we remain true to Harold's belief that challenges are best overcome through partnership and teamwork.

So, this morning, we are here to launch an unprecedented partnership between and among Maine's Community College System, employers, workers, private business, and our state government – all sharing this vision.

And all on a mission to enhance the skills and opportunity of unemployed and under-employed Mainers so needed by our economy.

Our state has faced profound economic challenges for many years – long preceding the pandemic. These challenges have impacted the most vulnerable among us, workers and their families

whose real incomes have remained stagnant for decades. While evidence of improvement emerged just before the pandemic, the pandemic set us back once more.

At the Foundation, we have seen these challenges and looked to do our part to combat them through grantmaking to educational institutions. As we looked for ways to help, we realized that the promise and importance of elevating educational opportunity for under-employed and unemployed Mainers could not be greater.

These folks are so important to our state and deserve the opportunity America promises all our people.

With that in mind, we looked for great partners. We looked for partners who shared our vision and mission to help. We saw that there was, and is, no educational institution better positioned than the Maine Community College System to enhance the skills of under-employed and unemployed Mainers and to do so by building close relationships with employers who need skilled workers to grow their businesses.

So, in 2018, before the pandemic, we invested \$3.6 million with the Community College System. Our grant was to build the infrastructure for and strengthen the rollout of new state-wide, short-term, skills-building programs for Maine workers.

These programs provided Mainers the chance to earn targeted, industry-specific skills that lead directly to employment or job advancement – all in a condensed time frame at low cost.

As this work unfolded, the pandemic wave hit, and our Community College System rose to meet the challenges of COVID-19. The System quickly saw that demand for accessible, short-term, job-relevant training programs went through the roof.

With the help of our grant, employers, and government leaders, the System's Quality Centers more than doubled the number of people in training programs and tripled the number of competency badges awarded to more than 7,600 learners. Separately, over 12,000 Mainers earned competency badges in COVID readiness.

And today, some 70 micro-credentials are offered, many of which support industry-recognized certifications in fields like health care, IT, and construction. In each case, business partners helped inform the programming and provided a direct connection to jobs for participating workers.

All of this occurred on top of traditional student enrollment of nearly 16,000.

Last year, the Foundation announced new grant investments in our state at a dollar level unprecedented in the Foundation's history – all strategically designed to improve the well-being and prosperity of Maine and its people. All designed to say we are going to come out of this Pandemic bigger, better, and more prosperous than ever.

Today, we continue our efforts to invest in Maine's future by promoting and funding still deeper partnerships between employers and educational institutions where each supports the other with effort and money.

Teamwork, Harold Alfond would call it.

So, when we saw what the Community College System is doing and has done with our first grant, and Dave and Fitz came to us with plans to significantly expand the breadth and depth of their workforce training efforts, it was time to double down on our Community College investment.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is a transformative moment – a moment of opportunity – in the history of our state and its future.

- We are on the cusp of defeating a pandemic that has ravaged segments of our labor force and widened economic disparities;
- We have a skills gap in our state and an aging population that calls out for workforce skills to meet the great opportunities that await us in this global economy;
- Thanks to our Governor and legislators, we have an enormous influx of Covid recovery dollars to help our workforce rebound;
- The health and beauty of Maine has become ever more obvious, ever more attractive as the lure of urban, densely populated states has waned;
- More people with needed skills are moving to our state as remote work has been proven to work;
- As divisiveness plagues the national scene, here in Maine our people, our educational institutions, our workers, and our employers are united in their determination to make things better; and
- Maine's Community College System has stepped up and demonstrated an extraordinary ability to bring opportunity and needed skills to Maine's workforce and employers.

What a combination! What a moment!

Simply put, the time is now to invest in the future and the power of our Community College System.

To this end, on behalf of the Harold Alfond Foundation, we are delighted to announce an additional grant, our biggest ever to Maine's Community College System, in the amount of \$15.5 million dollars.

Now for the details, I am looking forward to hearing from Governor Mills and President Daigler.

Thank you.