

Good morning Representative Murphy, Senator Rafferty and the members on the Joint Standing Committee of Education and Culture. My name is S. Paige Zeigler, I am a resident of Montville and I am here in support of LD 736, **An Act to Improve Ferry Service Reliability by Providing Scholarships at the Maine Maritime Academy.**

I retired from the U.S. Merchant Marine after 35 years. I started as an Ordinary Seaman and worked up to an Unlimited tonnage Master all oceans license. I was a member of the Seaman International Union and the Masters, Mates and Pilots union. I attended graduate school at Maine Maritime. I mention these facts in order to underscore my knowledge both in manning for vessel operation and the difficulty in obtaining sufficient training to be able to work at sea. The U.S. Coast Guard oversees seaman's documents and manning requirements of the different vessels. Vessel crews are divided into Deck, Engine and for some ships a Steward's department.

When I started at sea, it was only a matter of finding a ship that had an ordinary seaman or wiper position open and you showed up at the pier. If you went foreign you signed articles which meant you had to stay on that ship until your time was up or you returned to U.S. port. My first discharge was for 8 months. As soon as I had enough discharges I applied to the Coast Guard, who tested me on my skills and became an Able Bodied Seaman. Both of these positions are unlicensed, which are the positions that this bill is dealing with. At that time you didn't have to pay to advance. I didn't have to pay for my medical exams, we were covered under the Public Health department. I didn't pay for any testing until I took my Captain's exam (5 days). It was 350 dollars. However, by that time there were other costs associated with your documents that the Coast Guard didn't offer the testing for, but accepted from third parties. My unions and shipping companies paid them. I was lucky because I started my career quite a while ago. If you don't have that support, then you pay out of pocket. And now it is very expensive to pay for the necessary tests.

That is the issue this bill deals with, the ability to find unlicensed crew for Maine ferries. It also deals with the difficulty in being able to start the process of getting your documents. U.S. flag vessels have decreased in number, as have entry level positions.

I supported the Ocean School because they were working at helping students find a position without having to go to a 4 year school. Also, not everyone wants to be an officer. As a Chair of a school board, I always support careers for students who didn't like academics, but were hard workers who wanted to use physical skills.

The other part of this bill, besides the part helping young Mainers find a career that will keep them in Maine, is the ferry system has issues with being able to find enough unlicensed personnel to keep the ferries on schedule. There may be a feeling in the State that the islands are just a haven for the rich and indolent. But that is no more true than other areas in Maine. There is a vibrant fishery that adds to our State's economy along with the tourist economy. The ferry service is the highway to the island and as such the DOT is responsible for it. The islanders pay to use the ferry, but the State mans the ferry. If we couldn't get enough snow plow drivers because of complex requirements for manning I am sure the State would assist people applying for that job.

I suggest friendly amendments making sure this bill deals with unlicensed positions and that anyone who receives the stipend agree to work on Maine ferries for 2 years.