



Testimony in Support of LD 644:

“An Act to Expand Employment Opportunities for Minor Students by Eliminating Certain Work Limitations”

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Labor, my name is Harris Van Pate, and I serve as policy analyst for Maine Policy Institute. Maine Policy is a free market think tank, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that advocates for individual liberty and economic freedom in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 644, An Act to Expand Employment Opportunities for Minor Students by Eliminating Certain Work Limitations.

LD 644 would repeal arbitrary restrictions on the number of hours minors aged 16 and 17 may work during both school and non-school weeks and limitations on the times at which they may work. This proposal represents an essential step toward increasing workforce participation among Maine’s youth, supporting small businesses that need workers, and allowing young Mainers to gain valuable skills and experience.

Encouraging Workforce Participation and Economic Growth

Maine is facing a well-documented labor shortage. With an aging population and a shrinking workforce, employers struggle to find reliable employees, particularly in hospitality, retail, and agriculture. Many industries traditionally rely on high school students and other young workers to fill part-time and seasonal positions. However, Maine’s current labor laws impose stringent work-hour limitations on minors, effectively reducing the available labor supply and making it more difficult for businesses to remain operational.

By removing these restrictions, LD 644 would allow businesses greater flexibility in hiring young workers while still maintaining federal protections that prevent minors from working in hazardous conditions. More importantly, it would provide young Mainers with greater access to job opportunities, helping them to develop a strong work ethic, responsibility, and financial independence.

Aligning Maine’s Laws with Neighboring States

Maine’s current restrictions on teen work hours are among the most burdensome in New England. Many other states, including New Hampshire and Vermont, allow minors greater flexibility in their work schedules, particularly during non-school weeks.



New Hampshire allows 16 and 17-year-olds to work 11 more hours per in-school week than Maine does and four more hours per week than Maine when school is not in session.¹ Meanwhile, Vermont does not create specific limits on hours worked for minors over 15 as long as they are not employed in manufacturing or mechanical-related positions.² This disadvantages Maine businesses and minors, making it more difficult to compete regionally and nationally.

Additionally, excessive work restrictions reduce the earning potential of young workers, preventing them from saving for college, contributing to household expenses, or simply participating in the economy. By aligning Maine's laws with our neighbors, LD 644 will help ensure that Maine's young workers have the same opportunities as their peers in other states.

Promoting Individual Responsibility and Financial Literacy

Employment at a young age provides more than a paycheck—it offers invaluable lessons in responsibility, financial literacy, and workplace expectations. Research has shown that part-time teenage workers tend to perform better academically as they learn time management and organizational skills that benefit them throughout their education and working careers.³

Furthermore, studies indicate that young people who gain work experience early are more likely to achieve long-term career success as they develop workplace competencies that make them more attractive to future employers.⁴ Maine's arbitrary limits on teen work hours do little to protect students and deprive them of meaningful economic participation.

Addressing Concerns About Education and Well-being

Some may argue that expanding teen work hours negatively impacts academic performance or personal well-being. However, there is little evidence to support this claim. Many successful students balance part-time jobs with educational and extracurricular commitments, demonstrating that young people can manage their time effectively. Moreover, decisions regarding work schedules should ultimately be left to the discretion of students, parents, and employers rather than dictated by rigid government mandates.

¹ <https://drive-nh.thenewslinkgroup.org/youth-employment-laws-in-new-hampshire/>

² https://labor.vermont.gov/sites/labor/files/doc_library/WH-30-Information-for-Employer-Child-Labor-Law.pdf

³ <https://youthfirstinc.org/teen-employment-many-benefits/>

⁴ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2936460/>



Conclusion

Maine's existing work-hour restrictions for minors are outdated and unnecessarily restrictive. LD 644 represents a common-sense reform that will allow young Mainers to access more job opportunities, help businesses meet their labor needs, and bring our state's labor laws in line with regional and national standards. Maine Policy Institute supports LD 644 and urges the committee to vote "Ought to Pass" to empower young Mainers and strengthen our economy. Thank you for your time and consideration.