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TO: Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
FROM: Becky Smith, Director of Government and Community Relations
RE: Testimony Neither For Nor Against LD 1627 *An Act Regarding Workforce Development, Education Reform and Talent Retention*
DATE: April 24, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, please accept this testimony regarding section nine of LD 1627, *An Act Regarding Workforce Development, Education Reform and Talent Retention*. The Maine Community College System has no comment on the rest of the legislation. Section nine reads as follows:

Sec. 9. Department of Education to establish grant programs. The department shall establish a competitive grant program for employers to partner with schools, career and technical education centers and the Maine Community College System to create new training opportunities to address workforce gaps. The grant program must require employers to co-invest through matching funds or in-kind contributions. The department shall fund innovative pilot programs such as mobile training units or so-called earn while you learn models for high school students that focus on measurable outcomes.

The Harold Alfond Center for the Advancement of Maine's Workforce (Alfond Center), established by the Maine Community College System (MCCS) in 2021, is already advancing the vision outlined in section nine. Through partnerships with over 1,900 employers, the Alfond Center delivers short-term, stackable training programs that address workforce gaps across the state. Since launch, the Center has trained over 30,000 Mainers, with a goal to reach 70,505 more by 2030 through a historic investment from the Harold Alfond Foundation.

Training through the Alfond Center is highly flexible and can take place at Maine's community colleges, at a business site, or through third-party training partners. The Center also operates mobile training solutions in fields like commercial driving (CDL), mechanized logging, culinary arts, and welding — allowing access to rural or remote regions and meeting students where they are.

Maine Quality Centers (MQC)

MQC was created in 1994 by the Maine Legislature to meet the workforce education and training needs of new and expanding businesses and provides new employment and career advancement opportunities for Maine people. The program provides grants to employers for customized new hire or incumbent

worker training, supporting job creation and regional economic growth. Programs must demonstrate strong employer engagement and a public benefit. The statute defines three primary purposes for the program: job creation, workforce preparation, and partnerships. The program's public benefit is to serve the employer's need for additional skilled workers, give trainees portable work skills to compete in today's job market, and establish and maintain relationships that support regional economic growth.

Put ME to Work

Put ME to Work was created by the 127th Maine Legislature and was designed to address demonstrated training needs for occupations that offer competitive wages and benefits. This program supports industry-aligned training for high-demand jobs. It requires a 50% employer match (cash or in-kind), ensuring shared investment and strong partnerships between industry and education.

Three Stages of Training

- **Pre-Hire Training:** Prepares unemployed or underemployed Mainers for entry-level employment with industry-recognized credentials, often stacking into longer-term certificates or degrees.
- **Incumbent Worker Training:** Through the Maine Workforce Development Compact, employers can access up to a \$1,200 match per employee annually to upskill their workforce. Training is employer driven and can occur through Maine's community colleges, be delivered on-site at their business, or can be with a third-party training vendor.
- **Scholarships:** Working Mainers pursuing a degree or credential can receive 50% off two courses per semester from over 4,000 statewide offerings to customize their career pathways and help meet Maine's goal of 60% of the workforce having a credential of value.

These initiatives already embody key elements of section nine of LD 1627, including employer partnerships, co-investment, mobile delivery, and "earn while you learn" models. The Alford Center of the Maine Community College System stands ready to work with the Department of Education if the legislation passes and our expertise is welcome.

Thank you.