

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and distinguished members of the Labor Committee. My name is Ciel McGouldrick and I am the Program Director at Food and Medicine in Brewer, Maine. We are one of the partners in the Peer Workforce Navigator Project. I am going to use this time to share a testimony from a constituent who wanted to submit her story anonymously as she didn't want to share her name publicly in regard because she still feels some embarrassment about her unemployment overpayment. However, she was so moved by the help she got from a navigator, she wanted someone to share her gratitude and her experience. Suzy, the Navigator that this story about has worked with the project from the beginning, and we believe the words of her clients are some of the best and most convincing testimonies we can share:

"I received unemployment benefits in January 2024, which was well over a year ago. Recently, I got a letter in the mail stating that I had an overpayment, which was very confusing to me. When I first applied for unemployment, it was my first time ever doing so, and I believed I had answered everything correctly.

Being told I owe back over \$500 felt like a huge burden. I live alone and live paycheck to paycheck, so every dollar counts. I reached out to Suzy for support, and she was incredibly helpful. She kept me calm, told me not to worry, and explained that some of what the Maine Department of Labor is doing right now is intended to be educational, not a punishment. Even though I still felt anxious, Suzy's reassurance meant so much to me.

She helped me understand what the overpayment was about...She also reminded me to make sure I understood what I had done wrong and how to avoid making the same mistake again.

Suzy was absolutely right. MDOL called me and I had my hearing. The MDOL staff on the phone explained exactly what Suzy had told me — that these hearings are meant to educate people and clear up misunderstandings. In the end, they considered my overpayment an unintentional mistake, and that I do not have to pay the money back.

When someone applies for unemployment, it is usually during one of the hardest times in their life. That was certainly the case for me back in January, I was so overwhelmed. I had just lost my income, my insurance, and all of my benefits, and I was dealing with all of it alone.

But having Suzy walk me through this process now was beyond beneficial. Her support made a real difference and I feel so relieved. I truly hope that anyone who has to navigate the unemployment system has access to a Peer Navigator like her. It is such a valuable service."

This story shows the crucial role that Navigators play in building trust between working people and the State. I can say that this woman is now off unemployment and full-time employed in social services, making a huge difference in people's lives in Bangor too.

I urge you to support LD 1956 and support a program that has helped so many people in our community. Thank you for your time.