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Testimony in Support of LD 1956—An Act to Amend the Law Governing the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program and Establish the Community Workforce Connections Program

Joint Standing Committee on Labor
May 13, 2025

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and members of the Committee on Labor,

I am Eamonn Dundon, the Director of Advocacy for the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce. We represent 1,300 businesses in across region, collectively employing over 75,000 Mainers. On behalf of our members, I am pleased to submit this testimony in strong support of LD 1956.

LD 1956 strengthens and sustains two vital efforts to build Maine's workforce: the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program and the proposed Community Workforce Connections Program. This legislation provides an opportunity to invest in both the current and future workforce, connecting people with meaningful employment and addressing the persistent workforce shortages that continue to impact our members across every sector of the economy.

Through watching the Peer Workforce Navigator pilot program, we have seen firsthand the transformative role these peer-led programs can play. The pilot has become a cornerstone of the workforce development ecosystem, helping low-income and underserved individuals access support services, and ultimately connect with employment that offers stability and growth. Participants have not only gained new skills and certifications, but have achieved real increases in income and confidence, setting them on sustainable career paths.

Here in Portland, we are at a pivotal moment. Our city is home to a vibrant and diverse community of New Mainers and longstanding Mainers—individuals who bring with them tremendous talents, experiences, and a desire to contribute meaningfully to Maine's economy. However, many of these individuals face barriers to employment, including limited English proficiency, unfamiliarity with workforce systems, and a lack of tailored support. Programs like Community Workforce Connects can offer an essential bridge for these community members, connecting them with peer navigators who understand their lived experiences and can help them find and follow pathways into the workforce.

By expanding access to workforce navigation services and more flexible training options, LD 1956 ensures that we are meeting workers where they are. Not every job seeker can pursue a traditional college degree. Many are balancing jobs, raising children, or providing elder care. This bill supports innovative, community-based strategies that help individuals gain the skills they need in a way that works for their lives, and it helps employers fill critical roles with qualified, motivated workers.

Maine has set a bold goal of adding 75,000 individuals to our labor force by 2030. To meet that goal, we must do more than just attract new workers. We must invest in those who are already ready and willing to contribute by removing barriers, expanding access to services, and embracing models that work. LD 1956 does just that.

For all these reasons, we urge the committee to advance this important legislation. It is a critical step toward building a more inclusive, resilient, and prosperous workforce across Maine. Thank you for your time and leadership on these important issues.