

LD 265 Testimony

February 13, 2023

My name is William Benson and I live in Gorham, Maine. I am the Executive Director of Boots2Roots. Boots2Roots is a Maine nonprofit with the mission of assisting active-duty military servicemembers transition to meaningful work in Maine. I am also a veteran, having spent 24 years in Army, and a former Maine small business owner of a manufacturing company in the wood products industry.

I am speaking today in support of LD265- funding to attract and assist active-duty military, Veterans and families transition to work in Maine.

Transitioning from the military to the civilian workforce can be challenging under the best conditions. Often veterans struggle to find post-military careers that replicate the sense of purpose they had while on active duty. Translating military experiences into skills that civilian hiring managers understand is an additional challenge. Transitioning to work in Maine provides its own set of challenges. Specifically, Maine lacks any large military bases. Maine also lacks many "magnate" employers with specific programs to recruit and retain military talent. And frankly, if you are not from Maine, breaking into the Maine business community can be daunting. Personal relationships are still important. In short, the pathways to employment after military service don't exist in Maine like they do in other states.

Funding a program to attract military talent and assist in transitioning to Maine's workforce will give Maine a competitive advantage over other states in attracting military talent. 200,000 military members transition from active duty each year. Virtually all of them will go to work. Importantly, a significant portion are married with children. Like my family, they will go on to take those entry level jobs that Maine employers find so hard to fill.

When we moved to Maine in 2014, our oldest daughter was 14. She eventually went on to work at several restaurants and coffee shops in the greater Portland area. She is currently completing her Masters in Education and is student teaching at Noble HS in Berwick. Our middle son worked summers at Splash Town. He is currently a Marine serving in North Carolina. The good news is that he married his HS sweetheart from Gorham and they are committed to moving back to Maine to be close to family when they start a family of their own. Our youngest graduates HS this year. His plan is to attend SMCC for Fire Science and become a Gorham Firefighter. And I would be remiss if I forget to mention that my wife is a registered nurse in the Emergency Room at Southern Maine Community Hospital.

I share these details as an example of the potential return on investment for attracting military talent to Maine. In many cases Maine benefits from a whole family of workers. And most prior military bring Federal dollars with them in the form of the GI Bill, VA and other healthcare, and federal pensions. All of these federal dollars are going to be spent somewhere; funding LD256 ensures more of these federal dollars are spent in Maine. The return on investment is exponential.

There is only upside to attracting military servicemembers to Maine's workforce. With your help we can make Maine the destination of choice for military members after active-duty service. Thank you.