



Glenn "Chip" Curry
Senator, District 11

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

**Testimony of Senator Chip Curry introducing
LD 1139, "An Act to Improve Ferry Service Reliability by Providing Scholarships
at the Maine Maritime Academy"**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

April 11, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Senator Chip Curry, and I represent the 26 rural, coastal, and island communities of Waldo County. Today I present to you LD 1139, "An Act to Improve Ferry Service Reliability by Providing Scholarships at the Maine Maritime Academy."

The Maine State Ferry Service plays a crucial role in our state's economy and transportation infrastructure, connecting our island communities to the mainland and serving as a lifeline for residents, businesses, and tourists alike. It is a vital part of our state's identity and holds immense importance for our fellow Mainers.

However, this essential service is currently facing significant staffing shortages, which greatly impact its ability to operate efficiently and reliably. These shortages have resulted in a record number of delayed or canceled trips, causing much hardship for the people who rely on the ferry service for their daily lives, livelihoods, and the overall well-being of our state's economy. According to the Department of Transportation (DOT), between May 9 and July 4 2022, they had to cancel runs on Penobscot Bay ferries a total of 29 times. Those numbers are from very early on in the season and, as you can imagine, the cancelations only got worse through the summer and early fall.

The consequences of these staffing shortages extend beyond inconvenience; they pose a significant barrier for permanent island residents who rely on the ferry service to access essential services, resources, and their way of life. When the ferry service is disrupted, families struggle to get their groceries, workers face challenges commuting to their jobs, and businesses and tourism suffer, affecting the region's economy.

Last summer, as the issue became more apparent through constituents' concerns and media reports, I visited the Islesboro Ferry terminal and spoke directly with riders, workers, and eventually the DOT, to understand the root cause of these disruptions. It became evident that the primary issue was a lack of staffing. The Staffing challenges can be attributed to many factors including insufficient pay, Covid quarantines, a lack of qualified workers, and too few backup staff. I am pleased to hear that the Department of Transportation is taking steps to increase wages and strengthen its staffing to avoid a repeat this coming summer. It is clear, however, that we need more people to enter this field to ensure the stability of the ferry service.

*Chair, Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business Committee
Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee*

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LD 1139 aims to take a proactive approach to the staffing situation by seeking to increase the number of people along the coast with the initial credentials necessary to work for the ferry service. LD 1139 proposes to provide a minimum of 115 scholarships to Maine people to take the basic training course through Maine Maritime Academy's Center for Professional Mariner Development based in Bucksport. Each scholarship is valued at up to \$1,250, ensuring that students have the financial support they need to pursue their education and training.

By investing in the education and training of the next generation of dedicated workers, we not only help the students but also contribute to the overall stability and growth of our state's economy. A well-trained workforce dedicated to maintaining the vital connection between our island communities and the mainland benefits residents, businesses, and tourists alike.

In conclusion, LD 1139 is a forward-thinking and proactive solution to the pressing challenges the Maine State Ferry Service faces. By ensuring more Mainers possess the basic skills and required credentials for working on the sea in the Ferry Service we take a crucial step toward addressing the staffing shortages that have hampered this essential service, ensuring the continuity and improvement of the ferry service for the benefit of all Mainers.

I ask that you please give LD 1139 your full support. It is an investment in our workforce in a critical area of need. Thank you for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chip Curry".

Chip Curry
State Senator, District 11
Representing the 26 rural, coastal, and island communities of Waldo County

ATTACHMENTS

ON FILE