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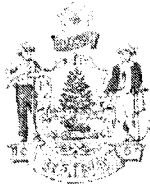
**Testimony of Representative Traci Gere Introducing LD 1539,
An Act to Promote a Diverse, More Experienced Construction Workforce
and Ensure High-quality Careers by Increasing Registered Apprenticeship Programs
April 19, 2023**

Good morning Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and fellow members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing. I am Representative Traci Gere, and I represent House District 134. I am here to introduce LD 1539, which proposes to address some of the challenges we face in building the construction workforce that we need to address Maine's housing crisis.

Many of you know that I currently serve as the House Chair of the Joint Select Committee on Housing, and have spent the past three years working on this committee and with the interim housing commission on preserving and creating affordable and attainable housing in our state. We face a shortage of over 20,000 units of housing for our residents with very low incomes. And we need attainable housing for young people and families, retirees, and the workers so important to healthy, vibrant communities – teachers, health care workers, public safety, and public works.

We are working in the Housing Committee on programs and funding to increase housing preservation and production, and it has become clear that the shortage of workers in the construction trades is a major obstacle we face. According to the National Association of Home Builders, Maine has the oldest construction workforce in the country, with a median age of 47. We need new workers in the construction trades who are well-trained and able to do good quality work, who are able to be safe on the job, and who can experience meaningful careers in the industry, so that they stick around. This includes addressing the challenges that “non-traditional” workers (women, people of color, people with disabilities) in the industry have faced and continued to face.

Maine has invested in registered apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs, including the legislation we passed in 2022 to reimburse registered apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs within the Maine Apprenticeship Program for a portion of the cost of classroom training. At the moment, we have over 700 apprentices participating in construction trade apprenticeships, and the programs are gaining momentum. It is the right moment to make sure that the programs are reaching candidates, including those from groups previously underrepresented in the construction trades – women, people of color, and people with disabilities – and that the programs are successfully graduating, placing, and retaining skilled workers.



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We're off to a good start, and LD 1539 does the following:

- Directs Maine Apprenticeship Council and the Department of Labor to establish criteria for funding registered apprenticeship programs in the construction industry. The criteria must establish benchmarks and consider the total package value that a registered apprentice graduate earns upon transitioning to journeyman status.
- Direct the Maine Apprenticeship Council and the Department of Labor to establish a financial incentive program for registered apprenticeships in the construction industry to recruit historically underrepresented populations.

These measures will assure that we are clearly defining for the apprenticeship ecosystem what a successful program is and how it will be measured. They are essential for continuously improving the programs, making sure that they are providing the skills needed in today's construction industry, and leading to competitive compensation packages that encourage workers to stay in the field. And finally, they are also essential to helping the construction industry adapt to the needs and expectations of a new workforce.

I am also presenting a sponsor amendment to strike Section 2 in the bill.

I am available to answer any questions. I thank the Committee for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Traci Gere".

Traci Gere
State Representative