



MAINE AFL-CIO

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Testimony of Maine AFL-CIO Legislative & Political Director, Adam Goode, in Support of LD 1539, "An Act to Promote a Diverse, More Experienced Construction Workforce and Ensure High-quality Careers by Increasing Registered Apprenticeship Programs"

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and members of Labor & Housing Committee, my name is Adam Goode. I'm the Legislative and Political Director of the Maine AFL-CIO. We represent 40,000 working people in the state of Maine. We work to improve the lives and working conditions of our members and all working people. We testify in support of LD 1539.

Registered apprenticeship programs train workers across the United States to become highly-skilled, construction workers through a debt-free, technologically-advanced education who earn a solid wage to support their family. In the construction industry, registered apprenticeship programs help recruit, train and retain workers with progressive wage increases, apprentice-to-journeyworker ratios that promote safety, uniform standards, safety training and eligibility requirements for instructors.

In this tried and true "earn while you learn" model, apprentices work on the job under a skilled worker and also receive classroom instruction. Apprentices earn great wages and benefits, a top-notch education without incurring any debt and secure a great career with family sustaining wages and benefits.

LD 1539 is about improving standards on publicly funded apprenticeship programs to ensure that Registered Apprentices are diverse, receive industry-appropriate training, and are fairly-compensated upon graduation. There are three core components of the bill.

First, to be eligible for state funding for a registered construction apprenticeship program, the program must graduate apprentices into jobs that lead to family-sustaining wages with strong health and retirement benefits so that workers can support their families. A wage paid without benefits, or a deduction of wages to pay for benefits, means a depressed wage and a job that doesn't reflect Maine's values, which is particularly important when we are talking about taxpayer dollars. We should limit state funding to construction apprenticeships that culminate in a journey worker wage and benefit package of at least \$40/hr.

Second, there needs to be more funding for programs in the construction industry that graduate the traditionally underrepresented populations of women and people of color; a minimum of 50%

of which must be distributed as a direct stipend for the learner upon graduation. The Department of Labor and the Maine Apprenticeship Council should support registered apprenticeship programs that recruit and graduate traditionally underrepresented populations in the trades, specifically women, African Americans, indigenous workers and other people of color by incentivizing programs that demonstrate effort and success, and providing a direct benefit to those learners to support their success in the industry.

Lastly, we support the increase in minimum allowable training hours for construction apprenticeships from 2,000 on the job to 3,000 on the job and from 144 in the classroom to 300 in the classroom. Construction is dangerous and increasingly complicated work. Ensuring registered construction apprentices get the full safety training they need to be successful in the field is the right thing to do.

For programs that are working to increase their standards, the bill provides an option for provisional status and a year to comply with the rules. There is also the option for the Department of Labor to grant a 6-month waiver if there is a hardship preventing compliance.

We would end by reminding the committee that everyone wants the jobs we support with taxpayer dollars to be attractive and to provide the workers with a shot at a decent life. Guardrails that make sure taxpayer dollars do not fund journey worker jobs that provide little benefits essentially reduce spendable wages and tie journey workers to a reliance on government assistance. Public investments in training programs should be marked by high standards for hiring and training from underrepresented populations, good wages and benefits, and training requirements that reflect the realities, dangers and complexities of the job.

For these reasons we ask that you support LD 1539.