



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION  
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002  
(207) 287-1400  
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

## **Tiffany Roberts**

35 Buttonwood Road  
South Berwick, ME 03908  
Home: (207) 210-3287

[Tiffany.Roberts@legislature.maine.gov](mailto:Tiffany.Roberts@legislature.maine.gov)

January 16, 2024

*Testimony of Rep. Tiffany Roberts presenting*

### **LD 262, An Act to Strengthen Maine's Workforce**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business*

Good afternoon, Senator Curry and esteemed colleagues on the Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business Committee. My name is Tiffany Roberts, and I represent House District 149 and the communities of North Berwick and South Berwick. I am here before you today to present *LD 262, An Act to Strengthen Maine's Workforce*.

The purpose of this legislation is to amplify the impact of a vital public-private partnership – the Maine Development Foundation (MDF). MDF plays a pivotal role in addressing Maine's workforce challenges and contributes significantly to economic and community development.

This bill has three separate goals:

- Extending The Term Limits of the Board
- Facilitating Collaboration with the state
- Appropriating State Funding

Our committee has witnessed the significant contributions of MDF to our communities and state through programs such as the "Policy Leaders Academy," "Measures of Growth" report, and the Maine Downtown Center. MDF has been a leader in enhancing the skills and education credentials of Maine's workforce, contributing to initiatives like MaineSpark and "Maine Adult Promise."

MDF's efforts with initiatives like the Forest Opportunity Roadmap and the SEAMaine address innovative pathways to prosperity. Importantly, MDF's statewide reach is invaluable to smaller service centers and rural regions, providing access to expertise and programming.

Established in 1977, this public-private partnership requires our support to ensure its continued robustness and broader community impact.

First, MDF currently has, in statute, Board limits of 5 years. MDF Board members have been consistently seeking additional terms to serve longer. This is a complex agency with a variety of programs, and the sentiment from past and present Board members is they feel they could have a much more strategic impact with more time on the Board while continuing to refresh the membership regularly with the proposed 8-year limits.

The second element in the bill seeks to strengthen and make even easier the collaboration between MDF and other state agencies. This provision allows and encourages relevant mutually beneficial work to be sourced to MDF but does not require it. It is inspired by the fact that the UMaine System and the State have had a master agreement in place since 1989 to enable appropriate sole sourcing. Since the drafting of the amendment, there have been subsequent conversations with DAFS, so we may need to address this policy initiative.

The third element of the bill is particularly important to appropriate General Fund support of \$250,000 per year to MDF to expand and sustain the impact of its invaluable programming and fulfill the pledge that the legislature made in 1977 and kept until 1991. I believe that we have bipartisan agreement on the value that MDF provides and see the potentially significant impact that would be available with this funding. Although one legislature cannot bind another, let us stay true to the original commitment.

Defining this funding as *general program support* enables it to go where it is most needed to match other funding, bridge other funding, and ensure that efforts can be persistent and powerful in reaching more communities and meeting the needs of workforce development and economic growth.

Currently, MDF receives a small amount of General Fund support each year of just over \$58,000, which is earmarked for specific initiatives. They also are a contractor to DECD for the Growth Council for about \$90,000 per year. This is out of their budget of over \$3 million, where less than 5% comes from the state.

I'm asking the committee to keep the legislature's pledge from 1977. And let's help ensure critical work doesn't wither on the vine when short-term outside grants come and go.

The needs, opportunities, and potential impact of MDF as a public-private partnership are greater than ever. MDF has been doing phenomenal work on our behalf for 45 years. They have leveraged their independence and private sector relationships and entrepreneurial grant-writing for this important public mission, even absent our original pledge. Imagine what could be done if that was restored.

In conclusion, this legislation will enhance MDF's organizational effectiveness, strengthen its collaboration with state partners, and increase its critical impact on our workforce, economy, and communities.

Thank you for your attention, and I am happy to answer any questions.