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THE MAINE SENATE
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Representative Roeder and colleagues on the Labor and Housing Committee, it's my honor to present what I hope will be the last bill to have a public hearing before our committee this legislative session. It's fitting that the matter we consider today represents something of a culmination of many of the issues we've considered over the last 15 months.

We're all now very familiar with Maine's workforce and demographic challenges. We have the oldest population of any state in the country, our workforce is shrinking and it is projected to continue to shrink. It is vital that we make sure new workers in Maine are trained in the skills our state most vitally needs.

This bill pursues that end by expanding on existing, successful programs of apprenticeship that allow Mainers to pursue careers, earn while they learn and complete their education and begin working without being burdened with debt. This training is done in concert with employers, making sure workers have the right skills and opportunities to attain high-quality jobs that need to be done.

Pre-apprenticeship is a shorter program that comes first in order to help workers choose the apprenticeship and then the career that is right for them. They also provide training in interviewing, teamwork and other "soft skills," that aren't part of a traditional apprenticeship program but that have been found to be important for these workers' success. It also allows them a clear pathway to begin and complete a registered apprenticeship with which they already have a relationship and familiarity.

These programs are particularly important for some of the workers we most want to recruit into the trades and into our economy, including low-income Mainers, people with disabilities, immigrants and those living in rural areas.

For some background, in 2022, the Mills Administration and Maine Department of Labor opened a competitive grant funding process to significantly expand apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships, in part as a way to maximize federal investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, the Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS Act. In 2023 Maine doubled the number of registered apprentices, and those investments are continuing.

This bill allocates \$12 million for another competitive grants process administered by the DOL through the Maine Apprenticeship Program to support registered pre-apprenticeship programs that train for priority sectors and in-demand jobs and that have a history of successfully placing workers into apprenticeship programs for these careers and specifically in high-paying jobs.

I'd like to make one final note, following some questions I've received: The change in this bill from "certified" to "registered" is simply semantic and meant to reflect the language elsewhere in Maine law and practice. To my understanding, it has no practical effect beyond the grammatical.

Thank you for your consideration and I'm happy to answer any questions.

Chair, Labor and Housing Committee

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