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Good morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Representative Michael Ray, and I represent the towns of Appleton, Islesboro, Liberty, Lincolnton, Montville, Morrill and Searsmont in House District 40. Today I present LD 736: An Act to Improve Ferry Service Reliability by Providing Scholarships at the Maine Maritime Academy.

Under Coast Guard rules if a ferry isn't fully staffed, then it can't leave the dock. If someone calls in sick, or is injured, or has to take family leave, and the Maine State Ferry Service isn't able to immediately fill the slot, then the boat doesn't move. This understandably causes a good deal of hardship for the people who rely on a ferry for their daily lives, livelihoods, or a bit of vacation time. For permanent island residents important appointments get cancelled, people can't get to work, fuel doesn't get delivered and groceries don't get picked up. People living on the mainland and working on an island find themselves with some down time that doesn't pay the bills. And the carload of tourists are going to find that the kids in the back seat might get real impatient real fast.

LD 736 aims to take a proactive approach to the critical staffing shortage by seeking to increase the number of people along the coast with the credentials necessary to work for the ferry service as Able Seamen. It proposes to provide a minimum of 115 scholarships to Maine

District 40: Appleton, Islesboro, Liberty, Lincolnton, Montville, Morrill and Searsmont

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, making sure that students have the financial support they need to pursue their education and training.

The bill admittedly takes a small bite out of the crew shortage apple - and I understand that the Maine State Ferry Service has been working hard to address this issue. Still, it's something that I believe can show relatively inexpensive results in short order. Short because the licensing course for an Able Seaman position is itself brief - one can be out the door and on deck in a few weeks time assuming they have enough sea time behind them. Inexpensive compared to the costs incurred in contracting for services from employment agencies.

These scholarships also serve as a strategic investment in Maine's economic future since they are part of a Workforce Development program that has demonstrated in other areas to be a critical, successful and sustainable tool. Last week in Joint Session we received just that message from the heads of the University of Maine, Maine's Community College system and Maine Maritime Academy. And I think that most of us who went on the MDF bus tour last month saw the successes of Workforce Development initiatives in action.

I should also point out that a bill similar to LD 736 came before this committee in the 131st session. It was voted out Ought to Pass - and I hope the same happens this session.

Thank you for your consideration, and I am happy to answer any questions and work with the committee should it wish on any amendments it feels are necessary.