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**Testimony of Dillon Murray,
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In Opposition to
LD 644, An Act to Expand Employment Opportunities for Minor Students by
Eliminating Certain Work Limitations
To the Joint Standing Committee on Labor
Hearing, March 18, 2025**

Good afternoon Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor. My name is Dillon Murray, Legislative Liaison for the Maine Department of Labor (Department). I am here today to speak on behalf of the Department in respectful opposition to LD 644, "An Act to Expand Employment Opportunities for Minor Students by Eliminating Certain Work Limitations."

The Maine Department of Labor is dedicated to fostering opportunities for young individuals to gain meaningful work experience. Obtaining a work permit as a minor offers invaluable experience, fostering skill development and a strong work ethic. However, it is imperative that such employment harmoniously coexists with educational commitments, ensuring that work responsibilities do not impede academic progress or overall well-being.

LD 644 seeks to repeal existing work-hour limitations for minors aged 16 and 17. Currently, these minors are subject to restrictions on the number of hours they may work per day and per week, as well as limitations on working late into the evening, particularly on school nights. If enacted, this bill would eliminate protections that ensure minors are not working excessive hours that interfere with their education and well-being. The bill also removes provisions that prevent minors from working during school hours, effectively allowing them to work at any time, which could negatively impact school attendance and performance, especially for minors experiencing poverty and may contribute to their household income. Additionally, record-keeping requirements for employers hiring minors would be repealed, reducing oversight and accountability in youth employment. LD 644, as written, appears to repeal existing protections effectively permitting minors aged 16 and 17 to work during school hours.

Child labor laws emerged in response to the exploitation of minors during the Industrial Revolution, where minors were subjected to grueling work hours in hazardous conditions, often at the expense of their education and health. These laws are crucial for several reasons:

- **Protecting Health and Safety:** Minors are more vulnerable to workplace injuries due to their physical and cognitive development stages. The rise of industrialization transitioned child labor from agricultural settings to factories, exposing them to more dangerous environments.
- **Ensuring Educational Attainment:** Excessive work hours can interfere with school attendance and academic performance. Historical data indicates that child labor was associated with inadequate educational opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and limiting future prospects.
- **Promoting Healthy Development:** Balancing work and education is essential for the mental and emotional well-being of minors. Research has shown that child labor can hinder physical development and be detrimental to health, underscoring the need for protective legislation.

[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)

Maine first passed a child labor law during the industrial revolution when child labor and sweatshops were on the rise. The 1847 law addressed the amount of formal schooling a child must have in order to work. The intent of the legislation was to prevent the exploitation of children and to emphasize the importance of education. Truancy laws passed in 1887 required children under 15 to attend at least 16 weeks of school in a school year to work in manufacturing and mechanical workplaces.

In 1915, the Maine Legislature stipulated that children under 14 could not work during the hours that public schools were in session. The law also required working papers for children 14 to 16 years old.

The 1940s and 1950s saw great technological advances and business expansion. To protect children, the Maine Legislature enacted stricter youth employment laws. Recognizing the value of education to the growing economy, educational requirements for working minors were strengthened. Additionally, changes to youth employment laws and educational attendance requirements passed in 1991 addressed persistent problems of low graduation and high truancy and dropout rates in Maine schools.

On the Federal side, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938 established national standards for child labor, including restrictions on hours and hazardous occupations, to safeguard minors' health and education. These laws were instituted to strike a balance between providing work opportunities for youth and protecting their rights to education and safe working conditions. Repealing or weakening these regulations would undermine this balance and expose minors to potential exploitation; and go against the original intent of these protections.

The Department remains committed to implementing and enforcing policies determined by this Committee. However, we oppose LD 644 due to its potential to harm minors' education, health, and future prospects. We urge the Committee to consider these factors carefully and uphold the protections that have been thoughtfully established over the years.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have now or at a future work session.

The Maine Department of Labor is committed to serving Maine workers and businesses by helping employers recruit and train a talented workforce, providing workers with skills needed to compete in our economy, assisting individuals when jobs are lost, aiding people with disabilities reach career goals, ensuring safe and fair workplaces for people on the job, and providing research and analysis of employment data to support job growth.