

Thank you, Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Labor Committee.

As you know, my name is Representative Alicia Collins. I represent the people of District 61, the towns of Sidney and Vassalboro.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you and ask you support LD 644 – **An Act to Expand Employment Opportunities for Minor Students by Eliminating Certain Work Limitations.**

Maine was known as the state that produced the best workers. During the downturn of the 1990's, while residents were getting laid off, jobs in FLA were available to Maine residents because of our work ethic.

Lately, we can't seem to keep young people engaged in the work force. Is it because they haven't been exposed to work?

Our Contingency in Washington DC recognizes the need to put youth to work. According to an article in the Portland Press from February of this year, there is currently a federal bill that would allow 16- & 17-year-olds to work for their parents' logging companies.

Legislators were invited to the Professional Logging Contractors' breakfast a couple of weeks ago – the lumbermen there repeated what was in the article from the Portland Press, "teenagers who have an earlier opportunity become more interested and passionate about the work."

That isn't just for the lumber industry.

My brother, a small business owner in Southern Maine, attributes his business success to his first job - McDonald's. Starting on the grill, replenishment of the coolers, scheduling, food orders, managing a team and learning the profit & loss statement. These skills prepared him for "the real world."

My brother was a bit of a troublemaker, partying with his jock friends and drinking way before he was 21. But, at work, he had the ability to re-invent himself and become more than the jock on the football team.

At a time when Maine's truancy rate is 9.5% (2024 Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education Advisory Committee Report to the Legislative Committee

on Education and Cultural Affairs), down from 2021 13.9%, but up from pre-COVID 2019 5.5%. Working gives students options from being on the street, getting into trouble, or getting involved in illegal behavior. **Working gives youth a chance to earn, learn and succeed.**

Most large employers offer tuition reimbursement. Which allows youth to earn and learn while they are employed - not only wages, but the opportunity for secondary school for free.

We don't know how far we can grow until we are challenged to grow. Working in retail taught me how to face my shyness and move beyond what the school system had to offer. Working with people with physical disabilities, working with people with special needs, working with people older than me and working with difficult people – and those were just the customers.

These are the skills that brought me to the State House.

One more thing...

Picture it! Skowhegan Maine. The year is 1909. You walk into the local store and a 12-year-old waits on you. Her name is Margaret Chase. At about the same time, my grandfather, Robert Leab, was graduating from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Preparing himself for a life of dairy farming and raising 5 children.

This bill isn't proposing we put 12- and 13-year-olds back to work in the mines. It is simply a way to bring 16- and 17-year-olds back into the work force.

Thank you for your time today,

Alicia Collins

Resident and Citizen of Sidney