



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1440
TTY: (207) 287-4469

Mathew McIntyre

78 Tannery Road
Lowell, ME 04493
(207) 680-0678

Mathew.McIntyre@legislature.maine.gov

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and Esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, I am Mathew McIntyre and I humbly serve as the Representative for Maine's House District 18 comprising 16 towns and four Unorganized Territories spanning portions of Penobscot, Hancock and Washington counties. Today I offer testimony as the sponsor of **LD112**, "An Act to Promote Opportunities by Establishing a Student Wage".

As I begin, I offer my presentation is a direct result of engaging with many small business owners throughout District 18 and around the State, and I serve proudly to carry their voices here today for your respectful consideration.

Per Maine Revised Statutes Title 26, Chapter 7, Subsection 661, Declaration of Policy, "*It is the declared public policy of the State of Maine that workers employed in any occupation should receive wages sufficient to provide adequate maintenance and to protect their health, and to be fairly commensurate with the value of the services rendered*".

I fully acknowledge this general proposal has come before the Committee in each of the last four Legislatures, as introduced by multiple different Representatives or Senators, each with a little different calculus offered. I am here today not to be an annoyance. I am here today to ask you to carefully analyze the specific words of the policy I cited above, and as you do, please also know I will never promote, nor will I condone unethical or discriminatory wage practices. This Act is intended to provide relief to many struggling small business owners, and is also truly intended to promote opportunities that are currently being missed by our youth because of in-place statute.

Within our State's original 1959 minimum wage law there was language permitting for reduced wages to be paid, for a limited period of time, to "learners". In 2013 that specific section was repealed from Title 26, because it was found to conflict with language in a separate 2011 Public Law (Chapter 491), which established wage rates for those in formally structured apprentice programs. In so doing, it eliminated the carve-out for "learners", and has led us to our discussion today.

I want to share with you just a little about myself, that may help you to understand why I am passionate about this topic. I grew up in a family of nine children. That was a lot of mouths for my parents to feed, and a lot of backs to keep clothed. For a very personal reason I won't share today, at the age of seven I marched up the road to a local horse farm and pleaded for a job. I baled hay, I picked rocks and I shoveled a lot of manure, all for a whopping \$1.75 per hour. It was hard work to say the least, but when that first paycheck

landed in my hand I beamed with pride. When I eventually learned to perform more complex tasks on the farm, I earned my first raise and was able to save up and buy my first bicycle, which allowed me to get to work a little easier and a lot quicker than walking. I eventually earned another raise, saved up more and bought my first car which really opened up my world. All of this is not to say I needed to work because my parents couldn't provide "*adequate maintenance or protect (my) health*". They did great on both accounts. At the time I felt compelled to work for things I wanted, not necessarily to fulfill the basic needs of survival. During the journey of my youth, I learned the critical value of self-reliance and I believe it has served me well through my adult career paths. I reflect often and remain grateful to that farm owner for giving me my first opportunity, and for helping me to learn and grow.

Fast-forward to today. I am now a Representative for the People, and I believe one of the most important duties of this position is to truly listen to the concerns of the People and the larger communities we serve. No matter how benign, or startling or even heartbreaking their message may be to hear at that moment, we must also evaluate whether or not there are potential long-range implications. One such exchange during my 2024 campaign efforts still resonates with me to this day. It was one of my early door-knock exchanges with a constituent right in Lowell, the Town I call my home. To be very direct, a father shared with me that he routinely advises his young son to "leave Maine as soon as you can; there are no opportunities here for you". I also pose to you that too many small business owners around our State are struggling with the current economics we are all facing. Many have been forced to shutter their doors, and many more are wondering if they too will have to make that devastating decision. Their operating and overhead costs are skyrocketing, and every day they are having to figure out new ways to cut expenses, not to protect their margins, but just to stay open and keep people employed. Because our State's minimum wage law does not allow what it once rationally did, our vital community small business owners simply cannot afford to hire younger workers who need time and training to earn a wage that is "*commensurate with the value of services rendered*". I see an easily identifiable nexus between these two challenges, and believe this proposal can help to make headway into solving both.

The continued absence of a reasonable Student Wage sub-category in our current labor laws is needlessly curtailing valuable learning and growth opportunities for our youth, during their critical transition years from secondary education to full-time employment. I respectfully ask that you support this proposal, and help me to open up a few more pathways for our youth to explore, that ultimately will enhance their ability to learn, to grow and to build their own foundation for what will hopefully be their unlimited and unbound future.

I thank you for your time today, and will be glad to respond to any questions you may now have.