



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

Tiffany Strout

12 Anderson Lane
Harrington, ME 04643
Home Phone: (207) 598-7043
Tiffany.Strout@legislature.maine.gov

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Testimony
In Support of

LD 972 – An Act to Change the Entity Responsible for Operating the Career and Technical Education Center in Machias to Regional School Unit 37

Good Morning, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Representative Tiffany Strout from Harrington, representing the towns of Milbridge, Harrington, Columbia, Columbia Falls, Centerville, Addison, Jonesport, Beals, Jonesboro, Roque Bluffs, Whitneyville and Machias in beautiful Washington County and I am here today to present my bill LD 972 – **An Act to Change the Entity Responsible for Operating the Career and Technical Education Center in Machias to Regional School Unit 37.**

Like many, I wear several "hats" that come with different titles and responsibilities. Today I am here wearing several of those hats to share with you one of the best things that has come to my part of Washington County, probably in my lifetime, the Coastal Washington County Institute of Technology (CWCIT).

I graduated from Narraguagus High School in MSAD #37 in 1997. When I was in school you basically had two career paths, college and general. If you were signed up for the general course, you were looked upon as not going to make it very far in a career. The school offered automotive, technical drawing class and wood shop as extras. Unfortunately, there began a shift in what was seen as important and these programs closed at Narraguagus High School. However, MSAD#37 still invested in students' general education if they wanted to learn a trade. The students were lucky some in MSAD#37 had the insight to know trade schools would lead to a more successful careers and future.

From MSAD#37, students would travel to Machias High School for building trade classes and culinary studies. Students would go to Ellsworth for automotive, diesel, CDL and more. Students would also go to Bucksport for welding and Mount Desert Island for boat building. The MSAD#37 board had the financial investment of the community for students to attend these schools. While students were traveling, finally, Machias, the current Governance head of the trade schools in Western Washington County, approved Narraguagus High School for Law Enforcement and the Nursing programs.

This format continued until there was an opportunity to receive a \$2.1 million grant from the State of Maine to open a vocational school in Coastal Washington County. Everyone was so excited to have this great opportunity brought to the area, but we almost lost the grant due to a disagreement on where the facility should be located, similar to a school we did lose in the early 1990s because of the same issue. Eventually, it was decided the best opportunity for the future of the trade school was to invest in a building in Columbia, Maine which would be run by MSAD#37. Finally, CWCIT was able to be opened in the fall of 2020. With the award of the original grant, Aquaculture programs were able to be offered at Jonesport – Beals High School.

When CWCIT was first opened, the school was at capacity with 45 students for the programs that could be offered that first fall. Seeing that there was a lot of interest in these types of education programs, the board of MSAD#37 decided to invest in expanding the building and offering new programs. In looking at this, there was another opportunity for a \$450,000 infrastructure grant through the State of Maine. Here is where the confusion begins...

District 11 Addison, Beals, Columbia, Columbia Falls, Harrington, Jonesboro, Jonesport, Machias, Milbridge, Roque Bluffs, Whitneyville, Centerville Township, and North Washington (Part)

After several meetings between the superintendents of Machias and MSAD#37, it was decided the superintendent of MSAD#37 would sign the papers since MSAD#37 would be overseeing the grant, distributing the funds and making any matching dollar needs. Unfortunately, that was the incorrect decision, and we lost the \$450,000 grant.

Because MSAD#37 residents wanted to continue to invest in the trades, MSAD#37 board took out a \$450,000 loan to help cover the cost of the renovations and expansions. Those cost have been well spent as there are now about 150 students enrolled in the programs.

In 5 short years MSAD# 37 has invested over \$1 million to fund and grow the program offerings at the CWCIT in Columbia. Program offerings are automotive, diesel, welding, nursing, early childhood, law enforcement and CDL. Jonesport still has a growing aquaculture program and this year, computer technology was added to the building trade and culinary offerings in Machias.

CWCIT is more than just a school. CWCIT is changing people's lives. There are students who were making some bad choices, but because they were able to take and pass their CDL test, they know they can be randomly drug tested and could lose their license. Drugs are a major problem in our area. This school gives kids an opportunity for a start at a good career out of high school as many may choose not to go on to college, even a community college.

The students who attend CWCIT travel from four surrounding schools, Washington Academy, Machias Memorial High School, Jonesport Beals High School and Narraguagus Jr/Sr High School. When they are on the sports field or on the basketball court they are there to win for their sending schools. It is the Raiders, Bulldogs, Royals and Knights, but at CWCIT they are all technical trade students working together on projects.

Nothing highlights this more than the nursing program. This year the students in the nursing program competed in the Nursing Knowledge Bowl and took the Gold award at SkillsUSA!! Those four students were from Lubec, Machiasport, Jonesport and Harrington. The community is very proud of the students and are now helping them to raise funds to go to Nationals.

So, why is there a need for this bill? This bill would replace Machias as the governing body with MSAD#37. That is it. What this bill will do is specific to Western Washington County CWCIT oversight. Because MSAD#37 has 7 of the 11 programs, it would make sense both logically and for efficiency to have the place with the most programs be the governing body.

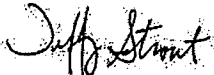
This bill will not change any structures in place, any students who can attend the schools and programs, any transportation or any payment reimbursement or requirements to be a trade school. The only change would be who receives the funding from the state for disbursement and bring clarity to who can sign and work on grants. This will bring efficiency and clarity for future growth of the school and programs. My hope is to be able to add more adult education opportunities as well as programs for high school students.

More efficiency means more programs that can be offered. The more programs offered the more students can attend and the more our communities can grow and thrive.

As I started out with this testimony, I wear many hats. I am putting this bill forward today as a Legislator, a MSAD# 37 school board member, a concerned citizen and most importantly a mom of a student who received his CDL and is currently taking welding his senior year at CWCIT, knows firsthand the difference this school is making in students' lives.

Thank you for your time today and I would be glad to answer any questions.

Sincerely,



Tiffany Strout
State Representative