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Testimony of Rep. Holly T. Sargent introducing

LD 1653, An Act to Develop Maine's Credentialed Workforce

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and distinguished colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Holly Sargent. I represent House District 147, which is part of York, and am pleased to present this bill, **LD 1653, An Act to Develop Maine's Credentialed Workforce**, on behalf of the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME).

We see various proposals each session to create new student loan and loan repayment programs to help address Maine's workforce needs. This year alone there are at least six related to FAME. FAME does a good job administering the ones that are funded and in statute, but there are many that cannot be funded or enacted. And each new loan or loan repayment that does get enacted requires substantial time, effort, and cost to set up, promote, create rules for, administer, and report on. There must be a better way.

This bill attempts to get a handle on these various proposals by creating one workforce credentialing program that could be more easily administered by FAME and respond with flexibility to the state's changing workforce needs. And there's no cost (yet) associated with the proposal!

The bill would establish within FAME the Maine Credentialed Workforce Program to support the credentialing needs of current and future participants in the state's workforce through student loan repayments to eligible persons who are employed in occupations identified by FAME (with input from experts such as DECD, MDOL, higher education institutions and others) as needing skilled workers. This bill is not seeking funding at this time, I instead ask that you help put this program in statute so that FAME may return in the future with proposals for existing FAME programs or new workforce occupations to consider including in the program.

Just this session alone, there are six separate proposals to create new grant, loan or loan repayment programs for FAME to administer. These cover occupations ranging from lawyers to dentists to loggers and fishermen to recent college graduates employed in the trades (tool loans) to foreign trained physicians and state and federal workers (shutdown loans). If enacted and

funded, these concepts would be added to the six existing higher education grant, loan and loan repayment programs FAME currently administers.

In this challenging budget environment, we are not requesting any state funding for the program. The language in the bill regarding the fund allows FAME to use internal resources, to receive outside funding of various kinds or eventually receive appropriations for the program. After the language is on the books, FAME can reflect, consult with stakeholders and possibly bring proposals in future years to bring existing FAME programs (e.g. Educators for Maine, Maine Health Care Professions Loan Repayment, Nursing Educators) and/or new legislative proposals into this new, comprehensive program.

I hope you will enact this new program and support FAME as they try to be more efficient and responsive in helping us all to address Maine's workforce needs. Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.