

**Testimony Hon. Brian Langley**

**Support of L.D. 1812**

May 9, 2025

**Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development**

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, esteemed members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee, my name is Brian Langley, and I reside in Ellsworth and am pleased to be here today to testify in support of LD 1812.

***“An Act to Provide Low-interest Loans for Accredited College Graduates Entering Trade Professions and an Employer Tax Credit for Trade Tool Reimbursements”***

Senator Curry, when I served in the senate part of this committee's jurisdiction was covered under the Committee on Labor, Commerce, Research and Economic Development of which I served on. I am pleased that leadership saw fit to separate Economic Development from issues surrounding labor. I served 4 terms on the Education Committee and terms on Taxation, LCRED, and Marine Resources.

After 27 years teaching culinary arts at Hancock County Technical Center and now as Executive Director of Bridge Academy Maine, I have seen firsthand the challenges our young people face breaking into the trades. I want to share a story that inspired this legislation: A talented young man who works for me at the Union River Lobster Pot is graduating from Eastern Maine Community College today with a degree in Automotive Technology. Yet, he hesitates to take a job as an auto technician-not because of a lack of skill or ambition, but because the cost of required tools is simply out of reach. His starter toolbox alone costs \$1,200. The empty toolbox. For a young person from a single-parent household, even after benefiting from Maine's free community college program, this is a daunting barrier.

This is not an isolated story. Across Maine, businesses are desperate for skilled technicians-yet the cost of entry keeps many qualified graduates on the sidelines.

**Committee Members, this is happening in your own districts. I did some research and found these openings listed in my testimony. In the interest of time I am not going to read them to you.**

- **Senator Curry :** Viking Lumber in Belfast and Mathews Brothers in Belfast are both seeking skilled maintenance techs and carpenters.
- **Senator Bailey:** Pratt & Whitney in North Berwick and Hussey Seating in North Berwick are actively hiring machinists and maintenance technicians.
- **Senator Bennett:** New Balance in Norway and Maine Machine Products in South Paris need CNC operators and industrial maintenance staff.
- **Representative Gere:** Kennebunkport's auto shops and HVAC companies like H.A. Stone & Sons are struggling to find new technicians.
- **Representative Collamore:** Cianbro in Pittsfield and Hancock Lumber in Pittsfield are both recruiting for electricians, welders, and mechanics.
- **Representative Eder:** Waterboro's auto repair shops and HVAC installers are facing a shortage of entry-level techs.
- **Representative Golek:** Bath Iron Works-just a short drive away-needs hundreds of skilled tradespeople.
- **Representative Julia:** Huhtamaki in Waterville and local auto repair businesses are eager to hire new mechanics and maintenance techs.
- **Representative Malon:** Saco & Biddeford Savings and local manufacturers like Volk Packaging need IT and equipment technicians.
- **Representative Mingo:** St. Croix Tissue in Baileyville and Calais Regional Hospital are both seeking maintenance and biomedical techs.
- **Representative Roberts:** Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and local HVAC companies are seeking skilled tradespeople.
- **Representative Walker:** Hancock Lumber and local marine service shops are looking for mechanics and electricians.
- **Representative Yusuf:** IDEXX and local construction firms are searching for lab techs, electricians, and HVAC installers.

These are real businesses with real job openings-waiting for Maine-trained graduates who are ready to work, but held back by the cost of tools.

**LD 1812 is a practical, targeted solution.** By providing low-interest loans for tool purchases and offering tax credits to employers who help repay those loans, we remove a critical barrier for new

tradespeople. This bill empowers graduates to step confidently into the workforce and gives Maine businesses the talent they urgently need.

I have worked closely with the Finance Authority of Maine, and I am confident they can administer this program effectively. The mechanics can be fine-tuned in committee, but the need is urgent and the concept is sound.

I urge you to support LD 1812.

Senator, I have sat in your seat as the chair, with leadership breathing down my neck, to get all the bills out of committee and to the floor to be voted on. You are all tired and looking forward to the end of session. If you see value in this legislation, and it looks like it needs too much work for this session, I would ask your consideration to carry it over to the next session so we can get this right. Maine's economy depends on a strong, skilled workforce-and that starts with giving our young people a fair shot at success.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to answer any questions.

## **Media Articles – Cost of Tools as a Barrier to Entry to the Workforce**

### **Waterboro Reporter – “Local Businesses Seek Young Tradespeople”**

Excerpt:

***“We’ve had an open position for an entry-level mechanic for over three months. Young people want to work, but they can’t afford the tools to start.”***

Owner, Waterboro Auto Repair

Date: April 2024

### **Sanford Springvale News – “HVAC Companies in York County Face Hiring Crunch”**

Excerpt:

***“We’re turning away work because we can’t find enough helpers. The cost of tools and certifications is keeping young people out of the trade.”***

Manager, D.F. Richard Energy

Date: March 2025

### **Portland Press Herald – “Maine’s Skilled Trades Shortage Hits Small Towns Hard”**

Excerpt:

***“Young people want to work, but they can’t afford the tools to start. We have more bays than techs right now.”***

Mike Allen, Waterboro garage owner

Date: February 5, 2024

### **Bangor Daily News – “Why Maine’s Trades Can’t Find Enough Young Workers”**

Excerpt:

***“Even with free community college, many grads can’t afford the \$1,000+ in tools needed to start work.”***

Date: March 19, 2024