



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Good afternoon. My name is Steven Bishop, and as the representative for House District 17 encompassing the close-knit communities of Orland, Bucksport, and Verona Island.

I am committed to advocating for the hardworking people and businesses in our rural corner of Maine. Beyond my role in the legislature, I own and operate Bishop's Auto Body, an independent repair shop that has served our neighbors with reliable, hands-on automotive services for years. We're a family-run operation that relies on community trust and local talent—but this also exposes us to greater hurdles, especially in recruiting and retaining skilled workers.

I am here today to strongly endorse **L.D. 1812, "An Act to Provide Low-interest Loans for Accredited College Graduates Entering Trade Professions and an Employer Tax Credit for Trade Tool Reimbursements."** This legislation addresses a core issue facing small businesses like mine: the widening gap in our workforce.

I see the challenge up close. In towns like Orland and Bucksport, where opportunities in the trades are vital to our local economy, we're struggling to find qualified technicians ready to hit the ground running. Talented graduates emerge from their programs with drive and expertise, but the steep cost of essential tools—often thousands of dollars—creates an insurmountable barrier, leaving them sidelined and our shops understaffed.

This is why LD 1812 matters. The bill creates a low-interest loan program-administered by the Finance Authority of Maine-that helps graduates cover the upfront cost of tools and equipment required to work in trades like auto repair, HVAC, electrical, and welding. These aren't optional expenses; for entry-level mechanics, for example, the cost of a



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basic starter set can easily reach \$2,000 or more, and as experience grows, so does the need for specialized equipment. For a small shop like mine, it's heartbreaking to see promising local talent sidelined, not by lack of skill or ambition, but by the price tag on a toolbox.

LD 1812 also includes a tax credit for employers who help repay these loans, encouraging small businesses to invest in the next generation of tradespeople. This is a practical, targeted solution that recognizes the real-world challenges facing both employers and job seekers in Maine's trades.

We know the demand is there. Businesses across the state-auto shops, HVAC companies, electricians, welders-are all struggling to fill positions because the cost of entry is simply too high for many. This bill gives our young people a fair shot at a rewarding, high-demand career and helps keep our local economies strong.

In closing, I urge you to support LD 1812. Let's give Maine's hardworking students and small businesses the tools-literally and figuratively-to succeed. Thank you for your time and consideration.