

# Testimony in Support of LD 1956

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Good afternoon Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor. My name is Nathan Davis and I am the Director of Programs at Gateway Community Services Maine, based in Biddeford, Lewiston and Portland. We are one of the partners on the pilot Peer Workforce Navigator Project. We are testifying in support of LD 1956 today because not only does peer workforce navigation have great impacts for our clients, but we see the positive impacts for the larger community and area economies as well.

Gateway Community Services Maine (GCSM) works to encourage, support, and build healthy connections—both within individuals and across communities—to promote well-being, vibrancy, and a strong sense of belonging. We envision welcoming communities where all people feel accepted, valued, and connected. Supporting immigrants and new—and long-established—Mainers in navigating the workforce is a crucial service. We are grateful to be part of the Peer Workforce Navigator Project, which has allowed us to integrate peer-led workforce support into our broader health and wellness programming. This integration enables us to address the social determinants of health in a holistic way. Our ability to meet multiple client needs through a coordinated team of dedicated professionals is essential to creating long-term, positive outcomes for the people we serve.

The stories of our staff and clients illustrate just how impactful integrated peer navigation can be. On September 24, 2024, Hatim, our Peer Workforce Navigator, attended the Clean Energy Career Fair in downtown Lewiston, which featured apprenticeship opportunities through organizations like the Maine Union Construction Academy, IBEW (the Electricians' Union), and the Laborers' Union. He brought several clients to the fair—individuals who may not have otherwise considered these fields. Thanks to Hatim's guidance and encouragement, two of them enrolled in an electrician training program. These apprenticeships not only provide skill-building, but also offer paid learning—a critical factor for many Mainers trying to establish themselves in the workforce.

Another success story comes from Grace, a Community Health Worker at GCSM. In June 2024, he met a young man who had just arrived in Maine. Together, they began addressing his most urgent needs, starting with housing. With continued support from Grace and our team, this young man registered for nursing courses at Central Maine Medical Center and began classes earlier this year. On March 8, 2025, he started a new job at Walmart while continuing his nursing courses and now volunteers his time as an interpreter on Wednesdays, helping others begin their journeys.

Through our team's efforts and teamwork, community members have secured employment, navigated health systems, received health care coaching and even found reproductive care.

Companies like MaineHealth, Gagne Foods, Proctor & Gamble, RevisionEngery, IBEW (Electricians Union), Spectrum and so many more are all places where we've built connections or helped people find work in Lewiston and beyond. Our work creates steps toward stability, career growth, and full participation in Maine's economy.

The Peer Workforce Navigator Project has also strengthened our ability to leverage other funding sources that support both workforce development and public health initiatives. For example, we've been able to align this work with grants focused on substance use prevention, cardiovascular health, and other wellness priorities—making our programs more holistic and our outcomes more impactful. This braided approach not only benefits individual clients, but also contributes to a stronger local economy and a healthier, more resilient workforce.

A clear example of this is our Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) grant supporting PWN Clinics in Portland and Lewiston. It has allowed us also to bring our community health outreach team to clinics, allowing clients to address multiple needs—like employment, housing, language access, or health concerns. Since launching the clinics we've seen that co-locating services in a culturally responsive environment significantly improves access and follow-through.

One of the most effective strategies we've implemented is inviting employers to the clinics. This creates immediate, meaningful connections: employers meet prospective hires face-to-face, and clients receive on-the-spot support from our navigators to complete job applications, understand workplace expectations, or ask questions they might not otherwise feel comfortable raising.

The DECD recognized the value of this model and is funding the continuation of our Portland clinic while also supporting expanded outreach to grow our Lewiston clinic. This investment—and the success it builds on—demonstrates how projects like the Peer Workforce Navigator can serve as a foundation for broader, community-wide progress.

We urge you to remember that your constituents—new Mainers and long-established residents alike—are depending on programs like this to build stable lives, strong families, and healthy communities. LD 1956 is an essential step toward ensuring that the important programs this body works so hard to create actually reach the people they are intended to serve. By supporting this bill, you are investing in a Maine where everyone has a chance to contribute, thrive, and belong.

Thank you for your time and for your continued commitment to a stronger Maine.