



MAINE AFL-CIO

A Union of Unions Standing for Maine Workers

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Good afternoon, Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Sam Boss and I am the Apprenticeship and Workforce Director at the Maine AFL-CIO, which represents 40,000 working people and retirees in Maine. I am here to testify in support of LD 1956.

In my role as Apprenticeship Director at the AFL-CIO, I coordinate our Union Construction Academy pre-apprenticeship, an intensive five-week training that prepares graduates for high-wage, in-demand careers in building, construction, and manufacturing. In my testimony today, I want to highlight the importance of the support that CSSP provides for our students, both during and after their time in our program. Most of the applicants for the Union Construction Academy are low or moderate income individuals who are looking to find more stable and lucrative careers. Registered apprenticeships are one of the best ways for people who are interested in getting into the trades to acquire the skills and experience they need, because they provide opportunities to learn on the job with seasoned experts while earning a liveable wage. That said, the earliest stages of apprenticeships are the hardest. Most apprentices earn a starting wage that's around half of what a journey worker who has completed the apprenticeship earns. The hours are long, the work is physically demanding, and there are also classes to complete to supplement the on-the-job training.

Many apprentices face significant barriers that could hold them back from navigating the challenging early stages and successfully transitioning into careers in the trades. For example, one of the most common barriers I see for participants in our program is a lack of reliable transportation. Because construction jobs are often spread out and in remote areas that are not easily accessible by public transit, reliable vehicles are a necessity. Unfortunately, I have seen multiple instances where talented graduates were derailed as they started their apprenticeships because they needed a car repair that cost a few hundred dollars they simply did not have. In the same vein, I've worried for other graduates who drove vehicles that weren't really roadworthy almost an hour each way to and from work because they were so desperate for the opportunity.



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The Competitive Skills Scholarship Program can and has provided critical support to our Union Construction Academy graduates by helping them to pay for car repairs or childcare as they get started. The process of enrolling in the program and providing all of the required documentation can be a lot to manage, however, and in the past we have seen qualified participants miss out on support because they did not make it through the application and enrollment process. For our most recent session, the Peer Workforce Navigators worked closely with CSSP staff to set up an information session for our entire cohort. Thanks to their efforts, and the continued support of the Peer Workforce Navigators, nine of the participants in our program completed their enrollment early during our pre-apprenticeship. They are now receiving critical financial assistance in getting training materials, vehicle repairs, childcare, and other support so that they can focus on excelling in the early stages of their apprenticeships.

I want to close here by emphasizing that the support that CSSP and the Peer Workforce Navigators provide not only benefits our graduates, but Maine as a whole. As I'm sure all of you know, we desperately need more workers in the trades to improve our infrastructure and increase our housing stock. By making sure that potential tradespeople are supported as they transition into their new careers, LD 1956 will set our workforce and our state up for a bright future.