

Testimony offered on behalf of LD1733

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Senator Breen, Representative Pierce and members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony with you.

My name is Colleen Quint and I am the President & CEO of the Alfond Scholarship Foundation. Our *My Alfond Grant* program invests \$500 at birth to every baby born a Maine resident. To date, over \$60 million has been awarded to more than 121,000 Maine children for their future education after high school. That's a lot of money – and a lot of kids – in a state the size of Maine.

I write today in support of LD1733 and, in particular, the Career Exploration Program contemplated within the bill.

As most of you are aware, Maine has historically had relatively high levels of high school graduation but lower levels of college-going compared with other states. And as you also are no doubt aware, to meet the needs of employers, Maine needs a more educated workforce.

Our most sincere hope is that the \$500 Alfond Grant we invest will be used by Maine students in ways that open doors of opportunity to them, and chart a path to prosperity for Maine. But we know that many students face barriers to postsecondary education and while those barriers can be financial, for many they can also be aspirational.

The Alfond Grant can - and research shows, does - have both aspirational and practical benefits. And I know from my many years at the Mitchell Institute, working with hundreds of students from across the state many of whom were first in their family to continue education after high school, that many Maine students have very limited awareness and understanding of career opportunities and of the path to take to get there.

By helping Maine students gain first-hand experience to explore career opportunities, the Maine Career Exploration Program offers just the kind of boost that students need to understand for themselves what career opportunities are out there, and what they need to do to prepare for those careers. For us, this means that more Maine students will put the Alfond Grant to use pursuing the kind of education and training that will lead to financial security for their families and a robust economy for the state.

And by offering incentives and assistance for working adults to access training and skill development opportunities, it means opportunity for employers and employees alike.

The Career Exploration Program that is part of LD1733 is an effective strategy to boost education outcomes and workforce readiness. I urge you to support the bill. Thank you.