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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

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Testimony of Speaker Fecteau supporting
**LD 144, An Act To Fund Capital Improvements to Career and Technical Education
Centers and Regions To Bolster Maine's Future Workforce**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Ryan Fecteau and I represent part of my hometown of Biddeford. I also have the distinct honor of serving as the Speaker of the Maine House. Today, I am proud to present LD 144, An Act To Fund Capital Improvements to Career and Technical Education Centers and Regions To Bolster Maine's Future Workforce.

Any homeowner in search of a plumber or driver in need of a mechanic understands the critical workforce shortages that exist in our state. Constituents tell me about the challenges of finding an electrician or contractor to perform small tasks in their homes. During bouts of particularly cold weather, oil delivery companies struggle to keep up, not because they lack supply, but rather because they lack drivers. Our state sorely needs well-trained workers.

Our public education system has 28 CTE schools with an expansive reach. You can find CTE centers in nearly every corner of Maine, from Farmington to Calais and from Biddeford to Frenchville. Students from those cities and towns, as well as surrounding communities, benefit from their offerings.

Maine's CTE Centers are preparing our students for well-paid, in-demand jobs. Whether it be a student who aspires to be a welder, a nurse, a computer programmer, or an electrician, the CTE system offers Maine students the training they need to be successful. We have the infrastructure. We have dedicated educators and driven students. But, in order to meet the needs of our students and our economy, we need to ensure the equipment and infrastructure at these locations are foremost maintained, repaired or replaced. That means investing in equipment and capital improvements.

Last year I connected with CTE centers across the state to assess their capital needs. From Sanford to Presque Isle, it became clear that CTE centers are in severe need of investment.

For example, the Oxford Hills Technical School in Norway is looking to add a much-needed welding program, which means investing roughly \$500,000 in equipment and updating a space to suit the program's needs.

Region Two School in Houlton needs updated equipment for its forestry program, including a processor, forwarder, and a skidder. We all know how important the forest products sector is to our rural economy, and this equipment, crucial to training students for today's industry, will run them more than \$1.8 million.

Extrapolate this need across the state and it is clear to me that we must take immediate action to invest in our CTE schools. I am confident that this investment will yield high returns for our students, our economy, and our workforce.

Many of the careers that our CTEs specialize in are high-paying. Welders, HVAC installers, machinists, and licensed practical nurses all have median incomes over \$40,000. This investment in our CTE system is not merely an investment in equipment, it will serve as a catalyst for economic activity.

This is also an investment that will help Maine meet our workforce demands. According to the Maine Department of Labor, by 2028 Maine will need nearly 200 welders, 287 electricians, 700 carpenters, and over 900 nurses. Maine has a workforce shortage and bolstering our state's CTEs will simultaneously bolster our workforce development pipeline.

Maine's CTE schools are invaluable resources and, with the investment proposed in LD 144, they can train a new generation prepared to meet the technological advancements in many careers throughout our state. Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.