

State of Maine
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Testimony of Wilson G. Hess, Chairman of the State Board of Education

In Support of: L.D. 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

Sponsored by: Speaker Justin Fecteau

Date: March 17, 2021

Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Wilson Hess, I am the Chair of the State Board of Education and I am here today on behalf of the State Board to speak in support of L.D. 144 An Act To Fund Capital Improvements to Career and Technical Education Centers and Regions To Bolster Maine's Future Workforce.

The State Board of Education is intended to act as a body with certain policy-making, administrative, and advisory functions. Specifically, Title 20-A §405, sub-§3 ¶Q authorizes the State Board to “serve as state agency for administering federal funds for construction of school facilities and for career and technical education” and (under sub-§7) develop a state plan to “administer any federal funds received for the benefit of career and technical education and programs in the State.” Thus, the State Board has significant interest in CTE facility construction and statewide planning in Maine.

In 2020, after a year-long review the State Board received federal approval of a new state five-year plan for CTE as required under the recently re-authorized federal Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (a.k.a. Perkins V). That plan highlights the importance of workforce development for Maine’s economy.

Today we wish to share four key observations with the Joint Committee in regards to LD 144:

The need is great: Maine’s population has the highest median age in the country. The working age population has already begun to shrink due to high numbers of retiring baby boomers and low numbers of young people entering the job market. Today there are unfilled jobs at middle class pay scales all around the state, even in our most rural areas. The reason these jobs are unfilled is that many potential job applicants don’t have the minimum skills necessary for entry – skills which our high school CTE programs can provide.

We know the areas of greatest need: The jobs and sectors that are in demand now, and that are projected to be in demand in Maine for the next ten years include computer analysis, construction, engineering, health care, hospitality, manufacturing, and transportation.

SBE is setting the roadmap for the future of CTE in Maine using the Perkins V state planning process and SBE's strategic goals. Of the \$6,247,167 Perkins dollar Maine receives, 85% goes directly to local CTEs and community colleges, much of which is the primary source of equipment funding for the recipients.

Keeping facilities and equipment in education aligned to current industry standards is an enormous expense in which we fall further behind every year. To illustrate this point let me very briefly highlight examples of the high cost of facilities and equipment from two selected programs -- Health Occupations and Automotive Technology.

- Just ONE new Automotive facility would cost \$5,000,000 and its equipment would cost nearly \$500,000 more.
- Likewise equipping just ONE nursing/healthcare facility costs nearly \$200,000 and a single, low-end patient simulator (a.k.a. SimMan™) costs \$50,000 - \$70,000.

With a total of 23 programs, which fall into ten career clusters, offered across Maine's 27 CTE centers and regions, the costs of meeting industry standards in secondary CTE are far beyond the current capacity of current EPS funding, local resources, and Perkins allocations to keep pace with existing programs, let alone the needs of a well-prepared, 21st century workforce.

The need is great for a statewide CTE capacity that can truly address our present and future workforce needs. LD 144 provides an important step forward.

The State Board of Education strongly supports of L.D. 144 An Act To Fund Capital Improvements to Career and Technical Education Centers and Regions To Bolster Maine's Future Workforce.

I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have. The State Board will be available for work sessions on this bill.