



Testimony of Executive Director, Ben Lucas

Testimony in SUPPORT of LD 313 "An Act To Advance Career and Technical Education Opportunities in Maine"

April 9th, 2021

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Ben Lucas, I live in Portland, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Maine Jobs Council. The Maine Jobs Council is a new, statewide, nonpartisan, member-driven advocacy organization that advances public policies to support the creation and preservation of foundational jobs in Maine. I am here today to testify in support of LD 313.

Maine has a serious workforce issue. We have an aging workforce and not enough young people staying or moving here. According to the Maine Center for Workforce Research and Information, the number of people in Maine over the age of 65 will increase by 113,000 in the next 5 years. In that same time period, the number of workers between the ages of 16-64 will decline by 31,000.

In fact, a report published just this week by "News Center Maine" noted that our retiring workers will leave 158,000 open jobs in the next five years. Maine needs to act urgently to develop a long term plan that helps our workforce and keep jobs in Maine, we believe LD 313 would help accomplish this.

As stated, this bill proposes to create a process that allows all high school students, including freshmen and sophomores, to explore their interest in career and technical education. We believe this change could improve the workforce issue in Maine, refocusing the K-12 educational system on CTE programs is a great start. Not all students are destined for four-year colleges yet that has been the focus of most K-12 education. Maine needs an overall strategic plan for the attraction of foundational jobs that can inform students about future employment opportunities and needed skills. If this legislation passes, it will make more Maine students aware of the opportunities that exist to get a job and start making a good wage. This can be a pipeline for foundational jobs, help move our economy forward, and help address the workforce issue.

Foundational jobs exist in industries such as manufacturing, construction, farming, fishing, forestry, transportation, and energy. They add value, create wealth, and bring revenue into Maine. Foundational jobs require having a skilled workforce, CTE programs are a way for the workforce to develop skills. Foundational jobs also require advanced skills for Maine Students in new industries with advanced technologies. As our economy rapidly changes, being able to have our students adapt to new innovations and industries is critical to keeping people employed.

In closing, we want to thank Senator Woodsome for bringing this legislation forward and Speaker Fecteau for being a cosponsor. We also want to thank the group of bipartisan members who sponsored this legislation and encourage this committee to pass LD 313.

Thank you.

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