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Testimony of Rep. Kristen Cloutier in support of
LD 1329, An Act To Establish the Career Advancement and Navigation Initiative in the Department of Education To Lower Barriers to Career Advancement Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Good morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Kristen Cloutier and I represent House District 60, part of Lewiston. I am here in support of **LD 1329, An Act to Establish the Career Advancement and Navigation Initiative in the Department of Education To Lower Barriers to Career Advancement.**

Establishing the Career Advancement and Navigation Initiative would provide educational and career guidance to support underemployed and unemployed individuals to acquire education, skills, licensure and other preparation needed to participate to their fullest potential in our workforce, including the many immigrants who live in my district and elsewhere in the state. In fact, the ability for this bill to advance opportunity and economic equity for Maine's Black, Indigenous and communities of color is why I so passionately support it.

LD 1329 will deliver services cost-effectively and expertly by leveraging and expanding upon the experience and accessibility of public school administrative district adult education programs. By providing individually tailored career navigation through partnerships with private sector employers and associations, as well as with other state departments, the initiative would offer individuals access to crucial resources, needed tools, and productive connections to overcome current challenges and barriers to engaging and advancing in Maine's workforce. The adult education programs operated by the Maine Department of Education are also particularly well suited to serve immigrants who have limited English who obtained their education and work experience abroad, as well as immigrants and native-born Maine adults who have been out of the workforce, are underemployed, or need reskilling or upskilling.

We have all seen the direct toll the COVID-19 pandemic has taken on our local communities and our state. Even prior to the pandemic, Maine was facing a growing workforce shortage. As we begin to slowly emerge from this crisis, and organizations and businesses look to hire new employees, we need to have programs and systems in place that support our economic development – now and into the future.

I urge the committee to join me in supporting this bill. Thank you for your time. I am happy to take any questions you may have.