TESTIMONY 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**

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Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Carla Dickstein, a resident of Wiscasset and retired Senior Vice President for State Policy and Research at Coastal Enterprises Inc. (CEI). I am submitting testimony in support of LD 1329. In my position at CEI, I worked closely with CEI's Workforce Solutions Program that helped vulnerable populations, many of whom were low-income, access jobs in companies that CEI financed, and helped companies improve the quality of jobs for these individuals. CEI played an intermediary role that showed companies how to navigate the workforce and training system to access more educational and training resources as well as support services for their employees. From that experience I fully support the importance of navigators to help underemployed or unemployed individuals, and especially those who are economically disadvantaged, assess career options and the necessary educational and training pathways for them to succeed.

This is particularly true for new immigrants to Maine. In 2016, I coauthored a paper, [Building Maine's Economy: How Maine Can Embrace Immigrants and Strengthen the Workforce](), that made a number of recommendations to help immigrants participate fully in the workforce, including more navigators to help both skilled and unskilled immigrants access job development support and placement assistance. First and foremost, they need access to English language classes through Adult Education programs, and/or contextualized English classes for specific industries, and understanding of workforce culture and norms also emphasized in LD 1329.

Key provisions that stand out for me in the bill are the following:

- LD 1329 would provide the structure and partnerships for workers today who are underemployed and would like better quality jobs and/or are currently unemployed or out of the labor market and want to reenter the labor force. It would be particularly helpful for women and minorities. National studies show that these groups had the highest percentages of unemployment or have left the labor force altogether due to Covid. They also had higher representation in the lowest paid, service jobs. (See [Brookings Institution]()).

- LD 1329 would use the Adult Education system in Maine to implement the bill. Adult Ed is the best bang for the buck to serve the eight targeted counties and eventually all of the state.

- LD 1329 provides a structure for the program to adapt to the predicted changes in jobs and future of work. Rapid digitalization throughout the economy is changing the types of jobs and workforce skills that are needed and is accelerating even faster than predicted since Covid. International Consulting company, McKinsey, says the Covid recovery requires digitalization and transformation; there will be no return to "normal." Jobs and skills even in the next few years are not necessarily what we see right now. Many jobs will disappear, and other new jobs will be created. Maine should be prepared to craft training and navigation programs, so that employers and workers are prepared for the future. Markle Foundation's report, Digital Blindspot, emphasizes that avoiding the digital blindspot requires "building not just new tech skills, but also the sort of foundational digital literacy that undergirds a more digitally resilient workforce capable of adapting and responding to new systems, tools and processes. This requires action across the ecosystem." LD 1329 can be a step in that direction.

LD1329 is very timely, and I urge the committee to support it. Thank you.