

The Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
Testimony of Ben Gilman of Gorham, representing the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, In  
Support Of L.D. 1329, “An Act To Establish the Career Advancement and Navigation Initiative  
in the Department of Education To Lower Barriers to Career Advancement”

May 4, 2021

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Ben Gilman. I am General Counsel to the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, which represents thousands of employers of all sizes and sectors across Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of L.D. 1329, An Act To Establish the Career Advancement and Navigation Initiative in the Department of Education To Lower Barriers to Career Advancement.

It is well-known that one of Maine’s greatest economic challenges is the size and the skill level of our state’s workforce. According to U.S. Census data released last week, Maine’s population increased by approximately 34,000 people from 2010 to 2020 - a rate of 2.6 percent, compared to the national growth rate of 7.4 percent. Maine citizens are aging, as is Maine’s workforce. Employers of every size, sector, and in every part of Maine are challenged to find workers, and workers with the skills or credentials Maine employers need to operate, succeed, and grow.

There is no singular solution to Maine’s workforce challenges. Multiple efforts are required to solve this challenge and put Maine on a trajectory to grow both the size and skill level of our workforce. Efforts that support adult education are a key part of the solution. L.D. 1329 is one such effort.

L.D. 1329 proposes a cost-effective initiative that will provide the resources needed to help strengthen job skills for many Mainers and more fully engage every Maine resident who wants to work. It will help support those who want to learn new skills to work at a higher level, and for some Mainers - including immigrants - it will help them participate in Maine’s workforce at a job level that matches their education and experience.

Furthermore, adult education support as outlined in L.D. 1329 aligns with a key component of the MaineSpark coalition - of which the Maine State Chamber of Commerce is a member. MaineSpark identified, set, and its members are working together to achieve a critical goal for Maine’s economy: by 2025, 60% of Mainers will hold education and workforce credentials.

Adult education also is necessary to meet the goal of adding at least 75,000 people to our workforce by 2029 as outlined in Governor Janet Mills' 10-year strategic economic development plan.

As Maine's economy is recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more critical than ever that Maine invest in solutions that will strengthen and grow Maine's workforce and employers' ability to compete and succeed.

L.D. 1329 is an effective solution and a wise investment to help grow Maine's workforce. It will help all Maine people reach their highest potential and participate in the workforce at their fullest potential. It also will serve to advance opportunity and economic equity for all Mainers and recent immigrants to our state. L.D. 1329 will result in strengthening Maine's economy, businesses, and communities, and help all Maine people succeed and prosper. It has the full support of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce.

Thank you,

Ben Gilman  
General Counsel  
Maine State Chamber of Commerce