

Testimony of Lee Umphrey, President and CEO
Eastern Maine Development Corporation

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

April 22, 2021

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Lee Umphrey. I'm a resident of Bangor and serve as President & CEO of Eastern Maine Development Corporation (www.EMDC.org).

Strengthening, diversifying and expanding Maine's workforce is an essential part of our mission as an economic and workforce development non-profit organization. Helping people who've faced challenges in life obtain the skills necessary to advance in their chosen field—while meeting the employment needs of Maine businesses—is central to the role EMDC plays in the state's economy.

With an aging population and many employers struggling to fill job vacancies, particularly positions requiring specialized skills, there's an increasingly urgent need to make sure our educational system leaves no one behind. With this in mind, strongly support LD 1329.

EMDC values and fosters partnerships and collaborations. They generate ideas, energy and synergistic outcomes. LD 1329 would create new partners in the workforce system as Career Advancement and Navigation Specialists provide support to individuals who might otherwise fall through the cracks.

We can't afford to have large segments of our population sitting on the sidelines. We all have talents and contributions to make. I'm especially pleased by the beneficial impact LD 1329 promises for Maine's Black and Indigenous workers, as well as for recent immigrants and new Mainers.

As the economy continues to evolve, this important legislation should significantly reduce the number of immigrants and native-born Mainers alike who find themselves confined to long periods of unemployment or underemployment. The guidance and navigation envisioned in this bill can change lives and bolster the workforce for the benefit of employers.

LD 1329 is a meaningful piece of legislation at the right time. It will enhance the effectiveness of adult education programs, give hope to individuals who might otherwise fall far short of their potential and help people break free from the tentacles of circumstance. Importantly, it will also provide a larger pool of job-ready employees to our business community.

Please support LD 1329 and contact me anytime with questions about this bill or other matters coming before your Committee. Thanks for your time and consideration.