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Sen. Chip Curry Presenting LD 814
**“Resolve, Directing the Maine Community College System To Evaluate the
Need To Expand Workforce Training Options in Waldo County”**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
April 23, 2021

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and honorable members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

My name is Chip Curry. I am the State Senator for Senate District 11, which includes all of the rural, coastal and island communities of Waldo County. I am grateful for the opportunity to present to you today LD 841, “Resolve, Directing the Maine Community College System To Evaluate the Need To Expand Workforce Training Options in Waldo County.”

We know that the workforce we have is mismatched with the jobs that are hiring right now. We know this because employers looking to hire can’t find the right applicants, and job seekers can’t find the right jobs. I’ve heard this from many of my constituents, and I’m sure you’ve heard it from yours as well. When the skills of the available workforce don’t match the needs of the available jobs, both businesses and workers suffer.

The Maine Economic Development Strategy lays out what we need to do during our current decade to build a diverse and sustainable economy. The report reminds us that our economy is changing quickly, and that we need to be prepared to support hundreds of thousands of working Mainers through this change. One part of this is helping people earn credentials beyond a high school diploma, so they are qualified to fill the jobs we have. This could be a two- or four-year degree, a license in the trades or a professional certificate. As of 2018, 44 percent of the State’s workforce had these credentials, short of Maine’s goal of 60 percent by 2025.

LD 814 directs the Maine Community College System to study the fields in Waldo County that are hiring, and to identify the additional workforce training options we need to fill those jobs. In Waldo County, we already know that fields like nursing, carpentry, electrical and HVAC have employee shortages. With no community college campuses or centers in Waldo County, we also know that the education many need to achieve their goals is simply not accessible. The information this study will give us will help us make targeted investments in innovative education and training programs that lead to good-paying careers, right in Waldo County.

For over 30 years, I've worked with people who are pursuing training and education programs in preparation for their careers. These people range from young adults seeking their first full-time employment, to folks in their 50s and 60s going back to school while caring for kids or grandkids. Identifying a career that's in-demand and matches one's skills and interests can be hard. When this career requires additional training or certification, understanding and accessing that training can be a major hurdle. Mainers are hardworking people. By providing local training for local jobs, and making sure people are aware of these opportunities, we can put that work ethic to good use.

If we want to develop a skilled workforce that matches the jobs we have, we need to be investing in innovative, accessible and speedy pathways to credentials that matter. LD 814 is the first step towards doing that for the people of Waldo County.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill. I would be happy to take any questions you may have.