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TO: Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
FROM: Dr. Janet Sortor, Vice President and Chief Academic Officer
RE: Testimony in Support of LD 1367
DATE: April 13, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Janet Sortor, the Vice President and Chief Academic Officer for the Maine Community College System, and I am providing testimony in support of LD1367 on behalf of the Maine Community College System.

Adult Education plays a critical role in helping under-prepared adults across Maine gain the skills they need to change their future and that of their families. The over 70 adult education programs provide a range of critical educational services to help these adults develop the skills they need in order to access educational opportunities, job training, and better employment. Without the support and services of local adult education centers—literacy and adult basic education, high school completion, English language acquisition, college and workforce readiness—these adults will not realize their full potential as productive workers and citizens in our state.

Maine's community colleges and adult education have worked closely together to provide a pathway for under-prepared adults to post-secondary education and training. Adult Education programs help Maine adults prepare for college and the workforce. They are the primary provider of foundational skills classes as well as programs like College and Career Access that help adults transition to college. Most recently that collaboration resulted in the creation of Maine College and Career Success Centers, bringing the services of Adult Education onto our college campuses. Adult Education success coordinators work directly with college staff to create a seamless connection between the adult education program and college so that adult learners transitioning receive additional, targeted support and increased success. Our shared goal is to increase the percentage of adult learners who successfully complete a community college credential. There is no time like the present because of the Maine Free College initiative. Maine has given adult education students in the classes of '20 thru '23, and potentially the classes of '24 and '25, an incredible opportunity—a free community college education—once they complete the HiSET. This is an opportunity to give them the support they need to do so.

Maine, like many states, is experiencing a mismatch between the skills of its workforce and the skill needs of employers. The state has set a goal that 60% of its workforce will have a credential of value by 2025 to address that gap and the future workforce needs of the state. As the state implements its 10-year Maine Economic Development Strategy, one of the key goals is to increase the participation in the labor force of the existing population and to help existing workers to upskill, which recognizes that adult learners are the largest population of potential skilled workers in the state. Helping adult learners gain the education and skills that they need to obtain or upgrade their employment and support themselves and their families is central to achieving Maine's economic vision and goals. Supporting Adult Education is a critical step in accomplishing that, especially right now. The Maine Community College System looks forward to our continuing collaboration with Adult Education in our shared mission of educating adults. Thank you.