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**Testimony of Dillon Murray, Legislative Liaison,
Maine Department of Labor
Neither For Nor Against LD 1969,
An Act Concerning Equity in Renewable Energy Projects and Workforce Development
To the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing
Public Hearing, February 28, 2022**

Good morning, Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Dillon Murray, and I am the Legislative Liaison for the Maine Department of Labor (Department). I regret that I am unable to attend today's public hearing but am submitting this written testimony on behalf of the Department neither for nor against LD 1969, "An Act Concerning Equity in Renewable Energy Projects and Workforce Development."

This bill sets standards for certification and evaluation of pre-apprenticeship training programs by the Maine Apprenticeship Program. There are currently no certified pre-apprenticeship programs in Maine, although several are in development. Certified pre-apprenticeship programs would provide a clear path toward registered apprenticeship programs and careers with family-sustaining wages.

The Maine Apprenticeship Program is a key component of the state's workforce development strategy and has had an increased interest with the current labor market. In 2021, the Maine Apprenticeship Program received a \$5.5 million State Apprenticeship Expansion, Equity, and Innovation grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. Maine was one of 15 states to receive this grant funding, which will help to continue to develop, modernize, and diversify registered apprenticeship programs across the state. A focus of the grant is expanding apprenticeship to underrepresented populations including women, people with disabilities, people of color, and justice-involved individuals. This aligns well with the focus of the proposed legislation, serving historically marginalized communities.

We offer the following considerations to the Committee pertaining to the section of the bill that defines a "Registered Apprenticeship Program". As it is currently written in the bill, a "Registered Apprenticeship Program" is a program that:

- 1) Is registered with and approved by the United States Department of Labor or the Maine Apprenticeship Program under section 3202;
- 2) Has been registered for at least one year, provides a minimum of 3,000 hours of on-the-job learning and 300 hours of related instruction; and

- 3) Actively trains employees, has functioning training facilities and is regularly graduating apprentices to journeyworker status.

The hour requirements as written do not align with current federal and state requirements for registered apprenticeship programs. Pursuant to MRS 26, Ch. 37, §3203, a registered apprenticeship program requires a minimum of 2,000 hours of on-the-job learning and 144 hours per year of related instruction. The additional hours required in this bill would limit the number of registered apprenticeship sponsors that would be eligible for these renewable energy projects. If a minimum of 3,000 hours of on-the-job learning will be required for apprentices in these projects, we suggest the related instruction requirement be adjusted to 216 hours to maintain the same proportional requirement of related instruction required of other registered apprenticeship programs.

In practice, most registered apprenticeship sponsors partner with the Maine Community College System and other education providers to deliver related instruction. Although we believe the legislation gives MDOL the ability to clarify the definition of “functioning training facility”, additional guidance about the intent of the language would be helpful.

Additionally, with the cooperation of the relevant state agencies, Maine Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Standards will be able to conduct the prevailing wage aspects of statute, including enforcement, as described in section 8 of the bill. Unless the number of covered assisted projects greatly exceeds expectations, we believe we can do so with existing Department resources.

In summary, the department appreciates the overall goal of this bill as it relates to pre-apprenticeships, and we appreciate Representative Cuddy and Speaker Fecteau for bringing this bill forward. Thank you for your consideration of my testimony, and staff from the Department will be available for the work session to assist with the technical aspects of this bill.

The Maine Department of Labor strives to ensure safe working conditions, protection against loss of income and enhanced opportunities for all people of Maine to improve their economic status.