



Mark E. Bryant
166 Albion Road
Windham, ME 04062
Phone: (207) 892-6591
Mark.Bryant@legislature.maine.gov

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1400
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

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***Representative Mark Bryant introducing
LD 252, An Act To Expand Training Opportunities for Department of Transportation Workers
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation***

Good afternoon Senator Diamond, Representative Martin and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation. I am Representative Mark Bryant of District 24, which includes part of Windham, and I am here today to present **LD 252, An Act To Expand Training Opportunities for Department of Transportation Workers**.

Right now, if you want to become certified to operate certain DOT equipment, you first have to receive proper training and become certified on that machine. The folks responsible for doing that training are called driver trainers, and here in Maine we're confronted with a situation where our capacity to train is being outpaced by demand. This bill would help remedy that problem by establishing five new driver trainer positions this year and then five more the following year. When I was asked to put in this bill, adding ten driver trainers was on the high end of the recommendation spectrum. Adding even just two each year would still make a significant impact. There are two key aspects of this field that make this legislation necessary: one is a demographic challenge, and the other relates to our rural communities.

As we all know, Maine has one of the oldest populations in the country. This circumstance is compounded in certain sectors, and it is especially felt among those in this line of work. Meaning, the driver trainers that we have out there right now tend to be older and will be looking to retire soon. These industry veterans are good at their jobs, and we need to provide them with ample opportunities to pass this knowledge down to the younger folks looking to learn. We are beyond the point of being proactive. We are facing a situation where there may be a large gap between the outgoing cohort of driver trainers and the incoming one if we don't act.

Because there are so many new folks coming into this work with little to no experience, each driver trainer needs to spend more and more time with their trainees. This brings me to the second issue this legislation will address. Aside from needing to build up the workforce so that it is not devastated once demographic trends turn over, we also currently face an uneven distribution of driver trainers that leaves rural and northern parts of Maine behind. I've heard from members of the workforce who complain about one driver trainer being responsible for too large a territory. With only so many hours in the day, these folks are spread too thin and can't devote the necessary time to properly training up new workers.

I thank you for your time, and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have, although I trust that there are others here to testify in favor of this bill who will be far more knowledgeable.