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TESTIMONY OF JEFF MCCABE, DIRECTOR OF POLITICS & LEGISLATION, MSEA-SEIU LOCAL 1989, BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION IN SUPPORT OF LD 252, AN ACT TO EXPAND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION WORKERS

SPONSORED BY REPRESENTATIVE MARK BRYANT

1 P.M. FEBRUARY 25, 2021, SH ROOM 126

Senator Diamond, Representative Martin, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, I'm Jeff McCabe, Director of Politics & Legislation for the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union (MSEA-SEIU Local 1989). Maine Service Employees Association is a labor union representing over 13,000 workers and retirees, statewide, including workers at the Maine Department of Transportation.

Right now, for each of the MDOT's five regions, the department has at least one position known as a Driver Trainer. These positions pay between \$21.24 and \$28.85 an hour, or \$44,179 annually at the bottom of the pay scale to \$60,008 annually at the top scale. According to the job description, a Driver Trainer trains, tests, evaluates and rates MDOT workers in the proper operation and maintenance of State of Maine vehicles and construction equipment. Driver Trainers work closely with crew-based supervisors in identifying, providing and documenting equipment training needs of crew members. Driver Trainers are required to have at least four years of training, experience and education in highway bridge and equipment repair and maintenance or construction along with at least one year of lead worker experience.

Currently MDOT employs around 900 Transportation Workers who plow our highways, maintain our bridges and operate the department's equipment. Driver Trainers at MDOT are the ones who train the Transportation Workers on how to do their jobs and keep all of us safe. The Driver Trainers train any Transportation Workers whom MDOT hires who don't already hold a Class 2 license. The Driver Trainers make sure Transportation Worker know how to do their jobs well and properly operate state equipment. The work performed by Driver Trainers helps keep the Transportation Workers safe, MDOT's equipment safe, the public safe and any private property that they work around safe.

Having an adequate staff of Driver Trainers is central to safe and effective operations at MDOT. The problem, as Representative Bryant noted in his testimony, is there just aren't enough Driver Trainers to provide the training necessary for the department's workforce. This is a real problem, and it's a statewide problem. While the department has made some progress through pay raises in slowing what has been a revolving door of Transportation Workers over the past decade, the fact is, especially in southern Maine, many private contractors continue to pay much better than the State. Some Transportation Workers hired by the State stay on the State's payroll long enough to secure their commercial driver's license at the State's expense, then move onto better paying jobs in the private sector.

The fact is, the demand for the services of Driver Trainer services at MDOT far exceeds the current availability of Driver Trainers. LD 252 will address this problem by creating and funding five additional Driver Trainer positions within MDOT. We think this is a necessary and responsible solution to address this problem at MDOT, and we therefore respectfully ask you to support LD 252.

We decided to bring this issue forward after hearing it from folks over the last couple years and as you know this time of year is a tough and busy time for our snowfighters. We captured some of their feedback to share:

The current driver trainers are spread over a large area with not enough time to spend with trainees and with a lot of older workers retiring, we need to be able to have trainers spend more time with new employees. Without proper training, MDOT will

not get the quality work they need for the State of Maine. - Donald

I work out of the Bangor camp and I support new driver training positions. There is a lot of equipment to be signed off on here and it takes a long time to get signed off. Also, in order to receive the Snowfighter bonus, you have to be signed off. More driver training positions would help with this.

- Angus

I am a Transportation Worker who spends lots of time taking fellow new hires from a regular class C license to the required class B. Many people specifically request me as a mentor due to the fact that I used to be an Army master driver and also have great patience. One new hire in particular never got the chance to meet with a driver trainer at all. On my own, I did all the training and personally took him to the BMV for his test from which he passed. There is a very large gap in the Driver Trainer to employee ratio. I'm only talking trucks here; there also are countless pieces of equipment that also require a driver trainer. If there were a better training program, there would be far less damage to the equipment and also public infrastructure from people trying to self-teach. - Brian

I think we should be especially be allowed to operate the equipment that's available in our lots within a year. Example: forklift, backhoe, loader, skid steer. These are all equipment that gets used more often. If a lot has all these, an employee should be trained on all within a year time and not have to choose.

-Joe

I am happy to answer any questions or provide more information to the committee for work session.