

March, 2021

*Testimony of Anthony Koss in support of **LD542**, An Act to Provide Support Services for Military Members Transitioning to Civilian Life in Maine.*

I am submitting this testimony as a retired Navy Lieutenant Commander, a Boots2Roots Teammate, and as a MEMIC employee.

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. My name is Anthony Koss. In April 2019, I retired after serving for 20 years in the United States Navy. Almost 19 years ago, I visited Maine for the first time when a Navy P-3 Orion aircraft that I was navigating stopped here for fuel before we started across the north Atlantic on our way to Keflavik Iceland. About an hour after taking back off from what was then Brunswick Naval Air Station, we encountered inclement weather which forced us to turn around and head back to Brunswick. For the next two days my crew spent what time we had seeing as much of this beautiful state as we could; Portland, Freeport, and Bar Harbor were all places that we saw during our time here. I remember going back to Naval Air Station Jacksonville Florida, where I was stationed at the time, with bags of gifts from L.L. Bean for my girlfriend, who has now been my wife for almost 18 years, and telling her about Maine and how I could see us living here one day.

Since that first visit, we've had two children, and we've lived in Washington state, Okinawa Japan, Virginia, Rhode Island, Washington State again, Rhode Island again, and Tennessee. We also made Maine a vacation destination whenever we could, and during those times, my family fell in love with it here just as I did almost two decades ago.

About this time last year, as we began preparing for my military retirement and our transition into civilian life, we literally looked at a map and asked ourselves where we wanted to settle down. Maine had always been at the top of a very short list, and I don't think that I need to tell anyone in this audience why.

So, I started searching, sending out resumes and cover letters, looking for opportunities from Bath down to Wells. I soon became discouraged, having taken for granted how difficult this process would be. I didn't know a single person here, I had no support network, and while I knew I possessed the skills and experience to add value to an organization, I did not know how to translate those skills into something marketable to civilian led companies. Discouragement quickly turned to desperation, and I began looking elsewhere, resigned to the idea that we would go wherever I could find work, rather than go where we truly wanted to be.

Then I met Jen Fullmer and the Boots2Roots team. All of the sudden, I had a support network, and that support network had an extensive community and professional network. I had interview coaches and mentors. I had access to teammates who had been in the situation that I was in, and I had guidance from proven leaders who knew how to translate my experiences into something that would be recognized as valuable by employers in Maine. The moment I connected with Boots2Roots was the moment that we realized that we didn't have to give up on our dream, that we didn't have to compromise on location in order to find meaningful work, and it was the moment that we chose to make Maine our home.

We arrived here in June and continued to search for that meaningful work, and the entire time the Boots2Roots team remained relentless in their support of and confidence in my family's success. On

August 12th, our hard work paid off and I began my next career as a Manager of Training and Development at MEMIC, an organization that clearly recognizes the opportunities created by Boots2Roots in growing the pipeline of quality talent into Maine's workforce. In September we bought our dream house in Saco and our children started school, reassured that for the first time in their lives, our roots were firmly planted.

I'm here to assure you that there are many others like me, hardworking and motivated men and women who have spent years serving our country, who are now searching for a new community, a new opportunity, and a place to raise their families and to call home. Some of us just need a bridge, one that connects our former career to our next one, one that connects our military community to a civilian one. I see this legislation as an infrastructure project for the state of Maine, as it supports Boots2Roots as they continue to provide and expand the bridge which will carry people like me to this great state.

Anthony Koss
Manager of Training and Development
MEMIC