



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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### *Testimony of Rep. Maureen Terry*

#### **L.D. 542, An Act To Provide Support Services for Military Members Transitioning to Civilian Life in Maine**

#### *Before the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs*

Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo and members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee, I am Representative Mo Terry and I represent the people of District 26 in Gorham. I am here today to present **L.D. 542, An Act To Provide Support Services for Military Members Transitioning to Civilian Life in Maine.**

First, I'd like to offer my apologies. In a rush to make sure all my bills were submitted on time, I neglected to send this bill in as intended.

Last session this committee heard this bill and did lots of work to make it better. I plan to submit for your consideration an amendment to the original bill that makes more sense on how to best help the organizations involved, bring new workers to the state of Maine.

The purpose of this bill is to help support and become a partner with organizations that actively go out and recruit retiring military members to come to the state of Maine and have it become their forever home.

I became aware of the need for such sustained funding through conversations with the Maine-based organization, Boots to Roots, whose mission is already in line with this legislation. Boots to Roots actively recruits and helps former and current, but transitioning, members of the military to acclimate to civilian life in Maine. They assist transitioning veterans in finding meaningful employment before the members even finish their service to ensure that they are well established for the next chapter of their lives. Recruiters travel to military bases around the country in order to reach a range of service members and their families and encourage them to choose Maine for their new life. It is crucial for these military members to know that they have a superior support system for not only themselves but for their families when they are finished with their service.

Maine makes sense for many veterans as they often share the unparalleled work ethic and sense of grit that Mainers are so well known for. Maine can benefit from this work force for many reasons, one of which is because we are currently facing a particular challenge. Despite the

pandemic, we still have a retiring workforce, a slow-growing population and many business and employment opportunities. The state's Strategic Growth Plan seeks to make positive changes to help balance out these conflicting factors. Organizations like Boots to Roots are ready, willing and excited to become active partners in this effort. I believe it is in step with the state's plan, to invest in organizations like Boots to Roots, who are perfectly poised to provide a meaningful benefit to our state.

Boots to Roots will follow me later with some hard data on their return on investment, thus far. It is clear that they are committed to being a part of the strategic plan. They have grown organically in the past few years but are fully dependent on the kindness of others and small investments from their business partners. Organizations like them, are solely dependent on fundraising. In order to plan programs down the road, consistency in funding is paramount. I think Maine should become a financial partner with these kinds of recruiters and I think this legislation provides a pathway towards that end.

My amendment proposes that DECD, in consultation with the Director of the Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services within the Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management, establish a 2-year pilot project to conduct outreach and to provide support services for active duty military members who are transitioning to civilian life in the State and their families.

There are other programs that the state offers to assist in recruiting vets with all forms of experience. This would be a very useful tool that the state can partner up with the private sector to bring new Mainers to the state.

Thanks for your consideration and I will entertain any questions.