

## Testimony in Support of LD 1373, An Act to Create the Put ME to Work Program

Senator Volk, Representative Herbig, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor, Commerce, Research, and Economic Development, my name is Jody Harris. I am the associate director of the Maine Center for Economic Policy. I am here today to testify in support of LD 1373. This proposal would work to help match more Mainers with high-demand, high-skilled jobs—benefitting both working families and the state economy.

Too many Maine workers are stuck in low-wage or part-time jobs and do not have the resources to take the coursework or skills training that would lift them and their families out of poverty. LD 1373 addresses this problem head-on, by funding the Maine Community College to prepare workers for high-demand, high-wage careers. It also includes private employers and state labor officials in the upskilling equation—using real data to guide workers and educators to train for jobs that will pay off.

Of the 50 U.S. states, Maine has the eleventh-highest rate of part-time workers who would like to work full-time.<sup>1</sup> We also have 112,000 low-wage workers.<sup>2</sup> Most saliently here, over 205,000 working adults in Maine have some postsecondary credit, but no degree or certificate.<sup>3</sup> Many adults leave college for financial or personal reasons and then find it difficult to return. Often the biggest hurdle is work and family responsibilities. This proposal addresses these barriers, both by committing \$250,000 for needs-based tuition assistance and grants, and by bolstering the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program (CSSP). CSSP goes beyond tuition assistance and recognizes the unique need of adult students—many of whom are parents—by helping with child care and transportation.

This proposal would not only benefit working families, but help the state economy. By working to determine which skills are in demand and working with postsecondary institutions to meet that demand, it will help provide Maine businesses with the skilled workers they desperately need. LD 1373 offers the prospect of a more highly skilled workforce aligned with market needs that will foster a more prosperous economy for everyone.

Thank you for your consideration and thank you for your service to the people of Maine.

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<sup>1</sup> MECEP analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

<sup>2</sup> Oxfam America. “Working Poor in America” map. Available at <http://policy-practice.oxfamamerica.org/work/poverty-in-the-us/minimum-wage-map/>

<sup>3</sup> Working Poor Families Project analysis of 2013 American Community Survey data.