

**Testimony in Support of LD 1467
An Act To Expand Competitive Skills Scholarships and Strengthen Maine's Workforce
Development Programs**

**by
Jody Harris, Maine Center for Economic Policy
May 2, 2017**

Good morning Senator Volk, Representative Fecteau, members of the joint committee on labor, commerce, research, and economic development. I am Jody Harris with the Maine Center for Economic Policy. MECEP is a nonpartisan research and policy organization dedicated to improving economic opportunity for working families by advocating for fairer tax policies, for access to education, health care, and livable wage jobs, and for critical investment in government programs and services on which Maine people rely.

I am here to testify in support of 1467, An Act To Expand Competitive Skills Scholarships and Strengthen Maine's Workforce Development Programs.

The only way to grow Maine's economy is to upgrade skills among current workers, maximize participation in the workforce, and boost prevailing wage. This proposal has the potential to influence all three of these.

Maine increasingly faces a demographic crunch and we need to maximize the potential of every Mainer by getting them the skills for the 21st century economy. CSSP has the added advantage of being designed to educate students in high-demand careers and thus meeting Maine employers' needs as well.

The hard fact is that today the vast majority of jobs that pay wages sufficient to support a family require some postsecondary education. We also know that low educational attainment is associated with unemployment and poverty.

Mainers without postsecondary education are mostly in low-paying jobs. In Portland, a single parent supporting one child and earning minimum wage needs to work 106 hours per week to meet her family's simplest needs.¹

Conversely, Mainers earning a credential (with as little as one year of a college) can pull themselves out of poverty, earning \$8,500 per year more than an adult with a high school diploma.² An individual with a bachelor's degree earns on average \$20,000 per year more than workers with a high school diploma.³

Lee Webb, Chair, Board of Directors

Lynn Davey, Vice-chair
Lock Kiermaier, Secretary
Chip Newell, Treasurer

Sandra Butler
Ben Chin
Pamela Cox

Scott Cuddy
John Dorrer
Karen Heck

Working adults want to go to school. Yet, for low-income working adults to succeed in higher education, the hurdles are immense. Parents have children or aged parents to care for. Courses are expensive. Financial aid often doesn't pay for part-time schooling. Adult students may lack study skills or computer skills needed to succeed in college.

Clearly for our hardest working families to have the same economic opportunities as the rest of us, Maine needs to do everything it can to support their educational attainment that will lead to better paying jobs.

The Competitive Skills Scholarship program provides grants to low-income students not only for tuition and books, but also for child care, transportation, and emergencies critical for adult students to enter and stay in school. Scholarships like these help overcome the lack of resources that prevent low income Mainers going to school, and they help direct them towards qualifications that will have a real payoff for them and for our economy.

This bill improves the CSSP program in two ways—by boosting funding to get assistance to everyone who needs it, and by broadening the reach of the program to include modern workplace needs.

I urge you to support LD 1467.

Thank you, I'll be happy to take any questions

Notes:

¹ MECEP analysis based on MIT living wage calculator, May 2017 and current minimum wage.

² Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. [Building Pathways to Success for Low-Skill Adult Students: Lessons for Community College Policy and Practice from a Longitudinal Student Tracking Study](#), April 2005.

³ U.S. Bureau of Census. [Educational Attainment in the United States: 2009](#), February 2012.