



Testimony of

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Before the Committee on Transportation regarding LD 652 – An Act to Allow the Reinstatement of Certain Commercial Driver’s Licenses

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Senator Chipman, Representative Williams and members of the Committee on Transportation, my name is Dana Doran, and I am the Executive Director of the Professional Logging Contractors of Maine. The Professional Logging Contractors of Maine (PLC) is the voice of Maine’s logging and trucking industry. The PLC was formed in 1995 to represent independent contractors in a rapidly changing forest industry.

As of 2021, logging and trucking contractors in Maine employed over 3,000 people directly and were indirectly responsible for the creation of an additional 2,500 jobs. This employment and the investments that contractors make contributed \$582 million to the state’s economy. Our membership, which includes 200 contractor members and an additional 120 associate members, employs more than 75% of the individuals who work in this industry and is also responsible for 80% of Maine’s annual timber harvest.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify on behalf of our membership in support of LD 652 – An Act to Allow the Reinstatement of Certain Commercial Driver’s Licenses. We would like to thank Senator Jackson and Representative Williams for bringing this commonsense legislation before the committee.

The logging industry in Maine was in the midst of a reinvention process until the onset of COVID 19 and the digester explosion at the Jay mill in April 2020. As a result of mill closures, curtailments and inflation created by the response to COVID 19, we are estimating that Maine has lost 30% of its harvesting capacity and the layoff of nearly 1,000 people in harvesting and hauling since 2020. In just four years, the industry has shrunk from an annual economic impact of \$620 million to \$582 million and total jobs have been reduced from 9,000 to 5,500.

In the spring of 2016, members of Maine’s Congressional delegation convened a working group of the forest products industry, affected communities, and other stakeholders to develop shared strategies to strengthen and diversify Maine’s forest industry and rural economies. Together, this group, which is now called the Forest Opportunity Roadmap for Maine (FOR Maine), has prioritized a path forward to achieve prosperity for the state.

Goal 3 of FOR Maine is focused on workforce development. “Maine needs to provide the skilled workforce employers need in order to attract new forest products opportunities.” The bill before you today would not solve our entire workforce shortage, but it certainly would help.

Maine is facing a shortage of log truckers that will grow and could hinder the \$8.5 billion forest products industry if we don't take a more flexible approach to opening doors for those who might have a proven track record to reenter the industry.

In March 2019, an employment availability and wage analysis prepared by the Maine Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Southern Maine for the PLC determined that the logging industry will need to replace 2,000 workers over the next 10 years because of looming retirements. One third of these replacement positions are forest products drivers. This issue is not unique to Maine and is similar to other regions of the United States.

It takes considerable time and expense to bring new entrants up to proficiency as productive truck drivers. On average, it costs a contractor about \$100,000 to train a new driver over the course of a year to fulfill the demands of the job. With increasing costs for equipment, fuel, insurance, contractors cannot afford this type of investment while also maintaining basic profitability. Contractors need a pool of properly trained drivers who can get to work immediately at a much lower cost.

While relatively simple, this bill will provide a third opportunity for a disqualified driver to reenter the field. It is our hope that they had good intentions when they first went down this career path and 10 years later, they have learned from their mistakes and can be given another chance.

The bill before you today is not the panacea and will not solve our dire needs for workforce, but it is a step in the right direction. I would encourage this committee to act quickly and vote Ought to Pass.

Thank you for your time and attention to this legislation and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.