

Invest in Maine workers. Invest in Maine.

Pass LD 1956! Let's build Community-Workforce connections and modernize the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program!

With an aging workforce, Maine businesses are struggling to find well-trained workers to fill in-demand jobs. **LD 1956** invests in our workforce by modernizing the **Competitive Skills Scholarship Program (CSSP)**. It establishes funding for **peer workforce navigation** through the **Community Workforce Connections Program**. This is modeled on the pilot Peer Workforce Navigator Project involving 6 community organizations working in partnership with the Maine Department of Labor to build bridges between employers, the state, and job seekers. **Peer navigators help workers meet their basic needs so they can access education, find a good job, and thrive.**

“We’re like community health workers,...but for the workforce!” - Peer Workforce Navigator, Houlton, ME

Peer-to-peer resource navigation is an effective, data-driven model. Peer navigators leverage their relationships and lived experience with community members to help people overcome common barriers to stable employment, like housing insecurity, lack of education, or transportation. Navigator services are empathetic, localized, and culturally-appropriate. Navigators help people genuinely connect to resources in their community by building strong relationships and truly understanding the unique needs of each community member with whom they work.

“Peer support makes me feel human.”

*Jen's struggle with her mental and physical health meant she also struggles to keep a job and home. But this year, a friend introduced her to Joleen, a Peer Workforce Navigator in Bangor. Jen and Joleen's relationship shows the power of peer support. Joleen understood Jen's unique barriers to employment because of her own lived experience with homelessness. Joleen started bringing Jen to PWN Resource Fairs, and now Jen is gaining experience volunteering by recruiting other low-income people to come to the fairs too. “Being homeless, you can't just get a job by snapping your fingers,” says Jen. “Before meeting Joleen, I was one of those people who would sit in a corner. But now I'm out here helping people too.” With Joleen's help, Jen is preparing to take her first class to become a substance-abuse counselor. She is excited to take her first step on her way to meaningful work and financial stability. **“We work together, me and Joleen. She has shown me that everyone is a work in progress. Peer support makes me feel human.”***



A 2024 study¹ by Columbia University found out-of-work Mainers assisted by a peer navigator:

1. **Acquired new jobs more quickly and at higher rates** when compared to other workers in the region.
2. **Connected to unemployment benefits faster** so they could more quickly return to the workforce.
3. Viewed Navigators as **“trusted messengers.”**



¹ Read the study here:
<https://peernav.short.gy/Study>

Invest in Maine workers. Invest in Maine.

LD 1956 builds Maine's workforce for a better economic future.

The Competitive Skills Scholarship Program (CSSP) helps Mainers afford tuition *and* all the things they need to successfully gain in-demand skills through workforce training. This includes transportation, books, a laptop, childcare, and more. **CSSP empowers Maine workers and builds the workforce Maine so badly needs.**

Marta's story

Marta has a finance degree from West Africa. She and her husband were living in a hotel when they first arrived in Maine, but that didn't stop them from getting right to work. Marta's accounting degree didn't translate to the US economy, so she enrolled in a local accounting program. But she needed help figuring out how to pay for childcare and expenses so she could finish school and get a good job. With the help of the Peer Workforce Navigator team, Marta learned about CSSP, got help evaluating her credentials, submitting paperwork and negotiating her eligibility with MDOL. Since enrolling in CSSP, Marta has landed a job at a local bank. She loves applying what she is learning in her classes to her job, and looks forward to the day she is a certified accountant. CSSP and Peer Workforce Navigators help add skilled workers like Marta to Maine's workforce.

CSSP works! Let's make it work for more Mainers!

- Six months after completing their CSSP sponsored, students **double** their income from six months before enrollment.
- **72%** of CSSP participants graduate from their program, compared to only **35%** of community college students.

What does LD 1956 do?

- Expands CSSP income eligibility to 275% FPL, ensuring more low-income workers can access the program.
- Established ongoing funding, outside of the General Fund, for community-based peer workforce navigators.
- Offers CSSP support services to entire cohorts of workers participating in a shared class or program.
- Makes improvements to the CSSP application process, so more people who apply successfully enroll in training.
- **Connects more Mainers to employment and training opportunities!**

