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**JOINT RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS
OF THE COMMISSION TO DEVELOP STRATEGIES TO
INCREASE POSTSECONDARY ACCESS, RETENTION AND
COMPLETION FOR LOW-WAGE, LOW-SKILLED ADULTS**

WHEREAS, the Commission to Develop Strategies to Increase Postsecondary Access, Retention and Completion for Low-wage, Low-skilled Adults was established during the First Regular Session of the 123rd Legislature by Joint Order 2007, Senate Paper 717; and

WHEREAS, the commission included 7 Legislators and 6 individuals with experience in workforce development and training who represented the Maine Educational Opportunity Center, the public higher education system, a statewide organization representing the economic interests of women, a statewide organization with expertise in economic policy analysis and one employer with experience in supporting educational programs for its employees; and

WHEREAS, the commission members concluded that the Legislature, together with officials in appropriate state agencies and public instrumentalities and other key private sector partners in industry, small business and the nonprofit community, must restore the development and training of Maine's low-wage, low-skilled adult citizens as a priority policy issue; and

WHEREAS, the commission recommended that the Department of Labor should develop uniform procedures at all CareerCenters to assist low-income, adult students in accessing a package of supports for which they are eligible and that they need to succeed in postsecondary education or occupational training; and

WHEREAS, the commission recommended that policymakers should strengthen the package of postsecondary education opportunity resources and support services available through the campuses and centers of the Maine Community College System; and

WHEREAS, the commission recommended that policymakers should seek to leverage federal Perkins funding to establish a career pathways pilot project in at least one sector of Maine's economy in order to prepare low-wage, low-skilled adults for high-wage jobs in industries with significant demand for skilled workers; and

WHEREAS, the commission recommended that the Maine Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators maximize access to federal financial aid resources by encouraging student financial aid officers at Maine colleges to provide adequate notice to adult students and to apply the professional judgment standard in a more uniform manner when considering the special circumstances that determine adult students' eligibility for student financial aid resources; and

WHEREAS, the commission recommended that, to the extent possible, adult education program resources be used for remedial or developmental education that prepares low-wage individuals to enroll in a postsecondary education program and enables such individuals to maximize eligibility for federal student aid resources to matriculate and complete a 2-year degree program at a college or university; and

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WHEREAS, the commission recommended that comprehensive and coordinated career counseling and postsecondary education access resources be targeted to adult students in rural and urban areas of the State and located at the campuses or centers of the Maine Community College System in a manner that is sensitive to the particular needs of these students in rural and urban settings; and

WHEREAS, the commission recommended that policymakers seek to coordinate the design and implementation of a public awareness campaign to inform low-skilled, low-wage adults about the package of postsecondary education and workforce development resources available to meet their education and training needs; and

WHEREAS, the commission recommended that the Maine Community College System and the University of Maine System seek to implement a coherent policy recognizing prior learning assessments for adult students. The commission suggested, in order to increase appropriate referrals for a prior learning assessment, that the Maine Community College System and the University of Maine System create a single checklist that the Department of Labor CareerCenters, adult educators and educational access providers can use to determine which adults are likely to benefit from prior learning assessments; and

WHEREAS, the commission recommended that as state budgets are reviewed and developed additional resources, as available, be provided to strengthen the package of postsecondary education opportunity resources and support services available through campuses and centers of the Maine Community College System, including career counseling, developmental education classes and other support services needed by low-wage individuals to access a postsecondary education or training program at the Maine Community College System; and

WHEREAS, the commission recommended that as state budgets are reviewed and developed the Governor and the Legislature seek to leverage federal Perkins funding to establish a career-pathways pilot project in at least one sector of Maine's economy in order to prepare low-wage, low-skilled adults for high-wage jobs in industries with significant demand for skilled workers; and

WHEREAS, the commission recommended, to the extent funds allow or are provided, that the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Education, the Maine Community College System and the University of Maine System forge public-private partnerships with career and technical education, adult education, the MELMAC Education Foundation, the Maine Compact for Higher Education and employers that will establish career pathways to more effectively serve the needs of the adult workforce and employers needing skilled workers. The commission suggested that as state budgets are reviewed and developed the Governor and the Legislature seek to provide funding to support these public-private partnerships in order to create such career pathways; and

WHEREAS, the commission recommended that as state budgets are reviewed and developed the Governor and the Legislature target new financial aid program funding to meet the unmet financial needs of low-wage, low-skilled adults to enable them to access education and training; and

WHEREAS, the commission recommended that as state budgets are reviewed and developed the Governor and the Legislature invest state dollars, as available, to match federal TRIO funds provided under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 to help low-income adults who are first-generation college students or students with disabilities succeed in college; and

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WHEREAS, the commission recommended that the Commissioner of Education work with the Maine Adult Education Association and the Maine Community College System to colocate adult education programs with community college campuses where feasible, to provide seamless remedial course offerings to low-wage adult students and to maximize the value of federal financial aid to students. Where such colocation is not feasible, the commission suggests that the Commissioner of Education work with the Maine Adult Education Association and the Maine Community College System to review, update and implement memoranda of understanding that allow acceptance of competencies and a seamless transition between adult education and college programs; and

WHEREAS, the commission recommended that the Department of Education continue to implement and expand the pilot programs of the Maine College Transition Program coordinated by the adult education system; and

WHEREAS, the commission recommended that, to the extent resources allow or are provided, the Department of Labor, the Department of Education, the Maine Community College System and the University of Maine System create a uniform data collection system relating to nontraditional-aged students, including but not limited to household income and employment at time of entry into the system, prior training and learning, type of program sought, retention benchmarks, stop-out periods, type of program completed, completion dates, duration of time in school and outcome data; and

WHEREAS, the commission recommended that as state budgets are reviewed and developed the Governor and the Legislature seek to provide resources necessary to create a system of benchmarks that tracks performance in enrollment, retention and credential completion for low-wage, low-skilled adults and that rewards performance of the institutions that contributed toward the achievement of the relevant benchmarks with incentive funds from a pool of resources established for the purpose; and

WHEREAS, the commission recommended that the Governor's Workforce Cabinet consider the feasibility of utilizing Department of Education 3-year grant funding to track the path of secondary school students, including participation in adult education programs, enrollment in postsecondary education and training programs through completion of a postsecondary education degree and certificate program and into employment in a new or better job. The commission suggested that the Governor's Workforce Cabinet design a measurement and accountability system to track Maine's progress in increasing the number of low-wage, low-skilled adults who attain postsecondary education built upon the existing data collection and management capacity of state agencies and postsecondary education systems; undertake a review of all current indicators across systems; assess existing data collection systems; and recommend a uniform set of indicators, databases and surveys that should be established and updated. The commission further suggested that the Governor's Workforce Cabinet report to the joint standing committees of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education and cultural affairs matters and labor matters by the first day of the First Regular Session of the 124th Legislature concerning the measurement and accountability system and include in its report a recommendation for the appropriate oversight body to keep track of students and their success; now, therefore, be it

That We, the Members of the One Hundred and Twenty-third Legislature now assembled in the First Special Session, on behalf of the people we represent, take this opportunity to express our support of the recommendations made by the Commission to Develop Strategies

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to Increase Postsecondary Access, Retention and Completion for Low-wage, Low-skilled
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