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**October 1, 2019**

**CONTACT:**

Kim Gore, State Director 207-751-0506 (cell); [kgore@readynation.org](mailto:kgore@readynation.org)

**BUSINESS AND EDUCATION LEADERS CALL FOR INVESTMENTS IN CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION TO FIGHT MAINE'S LOOMING SKILLS GAP**

*A new research brief highlights the serious challenges facing Maine's workforce, emphasizing the need to strengthen career-technical education and high-quality postsecondary learning.*

LEWISTON, ME – Without key investments in career-technical education (CTE) and high-quality postsecondary programs, Maine faces a **significant shortfall of skilled workers** that imperil the state's economy and will only get worse as the population continues to age.

That was the powerful message delivered by a group of leaders from the business and education communities Tuesday afternoon at the Lewiston Regional Technical Center. The leaders highlighted a [new ReadyNation research brief](#), "**Who Will Be the New Business Leaders in Maine?**," that details the workforce challenges that Maine faces, as well as some of the solutions to those challenges.

The speakers at the event included **Brian Langley**, Executive Director of the Bridge Academy Maine program, **Deanna Sherman**, CEO of Dead River and Chair, Educate Maine Board of Directors, **Jason Judd**, Executive Director, Educate Maine, **Emma Williams**, Bridge Academy graduate, and **Jen Williams**, the mother of two Bridge Academy students, including her daughter Emma.

Sherman emphasized the scope of the "skills gap" problem, noting that, if current trends hold, Maine will have a shortfall of 158,000 appropriately skilled or credentialed workers by 2025. She added that Maine's aging population—the oldest in the country—exacerbates the problem. Sherman noted that high-quality CTE and postsecondary programs are a way to raise the percentage of Maine workers with appropriate skills or credentials to 60 percent, the level needed to close the gap.

"From a business perspective, American companies and Maine companies need a prolific feeder system for skilled workers to fill both existing jobs and the jobs of tomorrow," Sherman said. "Maintaining and growing that feeder system is absolutely crucial to ensuring that our nation's economy remains competitive."

Judd underscored the need to increase the level of skills and credentials among Maine's workforce, adding that "A shortfall like the one created by the skills gap could be devastating" to the state's economy and businesses.

He noted that programs like the Bridge Academy help give students the skills and experience they'll need, which, in turn, serves to give Maine the workforce it needs down the road. He



reiterated that the state must maintain and enhance its commitment to these types of programs, saying “Maine cannot continue making economic progress without forceful actions on workforce development. That is the challenge of our generation.”

Langley offered more in-depth remarks about the amazing success of the Bridge Academy Maine program, and how it’s helping to move toward the [MaineSpark](#) goal of 60 percent of Maine adults achieving meaningful postsecondary training or credentials by 2025. To further spotlight the benefits that programs like these can have for students, Langley then introduced Emma Williams, a Bridge Academy graduate.

Emma Williams provided a compelling story of her time in the Bridge Academy, showcasing how her experience has already helped prepare her for the workforce, even though she’s currently only a freshman in college. Next, Emma’s mother Jen reinforced her daughter’s points, providing a parent’s perspective on the value of high-quality CTE programs.

Finally, Langley closed by noting that Maine’s CTE centers are terrific, innovative examples of how to match students’ interests and needs with those of Maine’s workplaces. He echoed the importance of investments in high-quality secondary and postsecondary options as a way to ensure that Maine has the skilled workforce it needs.

“Overcoming Maine’s skills gap and ensuring we have the workforce we need in the future begins with greater access and affordability of quality postsecondary credentials,” Langley said.

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