

# MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
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JOHN ELIAS BALDACCI  
GOVERNOR

LAURA A. FORTMAN  
COMMISSIONER

July 23, 2008

Hon. Ethan Strimling  
Hon. John L. Tuttle, Jr.  
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor  
220 Cross State Office Building  
Augusta, Maine 04333

Re: Competitive Skills Scholarship Program

Dear Senator Strimling, Representative Tuttle and Members of the Labor Committee:


I am writing you to update you briefly on the status of the Competitive Skill Scholarship Program (CSSP). This program was created pursuant to PL 2007, ch. 352 to help develop a skilled labor force in Maine and to provide assistance to low-income Maine people so that they can afford a postsecondary education or training program that will lead to a skilled job that is in demand in Maine. You may recall that this law was unanimously supported by the Committee, included support from both business and labor, and accomplished many reforms in our unemployment system. Among those, it funded CSSP via an assessment on employers that was, in turn, offset by a reduction in their unemployment taxes.

The first quarter of funding for the program was not available until April 2008, so we have had little to report to you about it until this time. I am pleased to report now, however, that the program opened for applications from adults seeking assistance to participate in education and training on March 31<sup>st</sup>. It was immediately so overwhelmed with applications that we were forced to close it to new applications in only two weeks so that we could assess the program's budget. In that short period we enrolled 162 people. This month we have reopened the program to take in 200 more people. The demand has again been so great that I am sure that it will be closed to new applications again very shortly.

I would look forward to giving the Labor Committee a more complete report on how the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program is working when it begins its work next session. It is very clear from the high demand that we are attempting to meet a very important and high need.

Thank you for your work in adopting this important legislation. It is already making a difference in hundreds of lives. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

  
Laura A. Fortman  
Commissioner of Labor