



**Remarks of Gregory W. Powell
Harold Alfond Foundation**

**Maine Community College System
Harold Alfond Center for the Advancement of Maine's Workforce Press Event
Southern Maine Community College
South Portland, Maine
June 27, 2024**

Good afternoon. Thank you, Governor McKernan.

Two years and eight months ago, as this state was emerging from the pandemic, we gathered here on this campus. We were here to announce the launch of an unprecedented partnership between Maine's Community College System, employers, workers, and our state government. All committed to enhancing the skills and opportunity of Maine workers so needed by Maine's economy. Change was needed. And when politicians, academics, and a charitable foundation are all talking change, it's not the change you find under sofa cushions.

So, our Governor stepped up big time with "change" and so did the Alfond Foundation. We committed to the rollout of new state-wide, short-term, skills-building training programs for Maine workers. These programs would provide Mainers from all walks of life the chance to earn targeted, employer guided, industry-specific skills that lead directly to employment or job advancement – all in a condensed time frame at low cost. We were proud that our Community

College System called this initiative the Harold Alfond Center for the Advancement of Maine's workforce.

I am here this afternoon to make a special announcement about the Workforce Center and to describe why we are as confident in the Center's future impact as we are grateful for the extraordinary success Maine's community college system has achieved in just the last 32 months.

There is an old saying which speaks to the way Harold Alfond thought about challenges and how to meet them: "You can't do a job today with methods from yesterday and be in business *tomorrow*."

With that saying in mind, we see that the workforce Center's model of experiential education in close partnership with employers embodies exactly the kind of adaptation, innovation, and teamwork needed to meet today's workforce needs and those of the future. There are many reasons for our confidence in this model, but here are four.

First, Harold Alfond was a big fan of higher education. He saw it as a way of giving people a better life and as a way of building the workforce of a community to thrive. Like Harold, his foundation today is also a big fan of higher education – for all Maine people.

This means that forms of higher education must be diverse, inclusive, and flexible to fully engage and harness the talent of Mainers from all walks of life, at different times in life, to meet today's needs. One size does not fit all in higher education any more than it does in making and selling shoes.

So, the model of education offered by the Center not only serves the compelling need of employers for skilled workers but offers Mainers who have not chosen, do not thrive in, or cannot afford the more traditional college or university experience a way to learn – a way which produces the immediate tangible benefit of a job.

Second, our economy is rapidly changing with artificial intelligence looming and blooming and technological innovation exploding. In the days and years ahead, this phenomenon will only accelerate. This means that Maine businesses of all kinds must adapt quickly to remain competitive. And to adapt, businesses will need a way to upskill employees at all levels, from frontline workers to mid and senior management. The Center is the perfect model and partner for employers looking to efficiently meet this critical need now and in the future.

Third, as Governor McKernan just pointed out, we are short on workers in this state. Retiring baby boomers and low birth rates relative to deaths have left us very short. But the good news is that our population has increased since COVID by some 32,500 people and this is attributable to net in migration of 48,000 people. Many of these newcomers are mid-age workers who will need to upgrade their skills as technological innovation advances and, with it, the need of employers to adapt. So, the Center's model of education is an important way to provide newcomers as well as existing residents the skills needed by an economy of accelerating change.

Finally, for over two decades the Foundation has looked to support higher education programs which provide Maine people with relevant job-ready skills that translate into economic return on tuition investment. A recent study from Georgetown University's Center on Education underscored the economic imperative of this linkage and how we are falling short in today's ever-changing economy.

The study found that more than a quarter (28%) of “middle-skills credentials” granted by higher education institutions are granted in programs with no direct occupational match. And further, that this misalignment between credentials and jobs is most pronounced in rural areas and for disadvantaged populations.

This mismatch – what Georgetown called “The Great Misalignment” – is exactly what the Alford Center for Workforce Advancement is designed to fix.

So, how has the Workforce Center been doing? The answer is terrific.

In a few minutes we will hear President Daigler give us the detail, but let me lead the way with two compelling statistics: 1,638 state businesses who employ 323,600 workers have signed on as partners to educate their employees. And over 27,000 workers have been trained in just 32 months.

When you consider all that has been accomplished, it is no wonder that the Center is now nationally recognized as a pioneer for workforce advancement.

So, on behalf of the Harold Alford Foundation, we extend our sincere thanks and congratulations to President Daigler and his exceptional team for their outstanding work. We thank Governor Mills and our state government for their financial support of the Center. We thank the legions of Maine employers who have invested time, effort, and money in their labor supply chain by working with the Center to recruit and train employees.

And finally, we thank the Maine workers who have invested in themselves, and in so doing, advanced our state's future. Harold Alfond loved teamwork, and this is teamwork at its best. And it's a winning team.

Success over the last 32 months is as welcome as it was needed. Yet, as we know and as Governor Mills has highlighted, our state still suffers from a historic shortage of skilled workers. We suffer this shortage at a time of great opportunity for our state and its economy. So, in the days ahead, the Center will need further investment to increase its impact. And to that end, the Foundation is confident that our state government and Maine employers will invest further in the expansion of the Center's work.

Harold Alfond loved to say: "Don't tell me, show me."

Well, I've been doing a lot of telling. You might be asking: "Where's the showing?"

So let me leave you with this. When the Foundation challenges others to step up, we want to do our part too. So, on behalf of the Harold Alfond Foundation, I am delighted to announce our investment in the Maine Community College System's Harold Alfond Center for the Advancement of Maine's Workforce in the amount of \$75.5 million dollars.

Congratulations and thank you!