

To:

Senators Breen and Rafferty, Representatives Pierce and Sylvester, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Labor and Housing.

I would like to offer my written testimony in support for New Ventures Maine (NVME). My name is Sophia Bailey, I work and reside in Lewiston, Maine.

Almost five years ago, I discovered New Ventures Maine while internet surfing for resources on starting and managing a business. I participated in a 12 week program called Venturing Forth with an amazing group of like-minded entrepreneurs and a dedicated instructor. I was taught how to develop a business plan, create budgets and financial projections. Venturing Forth guided me through my decision-making process for starting my business and improved my communication skills. Overall, it was a very challenging and well taught class.

With the knowledge I gained from Venturing Forth, I secured a loan and opened Caribbean Life Grocery Store on August 16, 2016. Since then, our revenues and profits have improved steadily every year. I was meeting my goals and the business was growing.

Then in March 2020, we were impacted by the COVID19 pandemic, and I was forced to adapt to the challenges. I referred back to my notes from Venturing Forth, I pivoted and currently I am still working to stay afloat. Today I employ three part-time employees, including my mentee from the Tree Street Youth.

New Ventures Maine is a strong program that helps individuals to become successful business owners. I would not be the person, or the entrepreneur I am today without the Venturing Forth program. Based on the knowledge acquired and experience gained, I was confident enough to start a second business, Jeff's Jamaican Cuisine in December of 2018. In 2020, during the pandemic this business pivoted from a physical location in Freeport and opened a food truck business in Lewiston.

Almost five years later, and I can always call on my teacher from New Ventures Maine if I need help or guidance in any area. It is not only an educational program it is a relationship. New Ventures Maine is a lifestyle change, it is futuristic, and the

continuation of the program is so necessary, especially with what's going on in the world today.

I urge you to continue to support and fund New Ventures Maine. This organization does not only change its students' lives but also their entire family. It is changing and shaping communities and building a better society. I thank you in advance for your continuing support to New Ventures Maine. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at the information listed below.

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