



H. 34 TESTIMONY

Vermont Ski Areas Association

Molly Mahar, President

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify about H. 34 this afternoon.

The Vermont Ski Areas Association, also known as Ski Vermont, is a non-profit trade association representing 22 alpine and 26 cross-country ski areas across Vermont. Our members range in size from volunteer-run non-profit community areas and touring centers all the way up to the state's largest resorts.

In addition to being an economic driver for the state, the ski industry creates 13,000 jobs during the winter season and about a quarter of those are year-round positions. Ski areas require a wide range of skilled and professional jobs and occupations to operate. The types of positions range from accounting, sales/marketing, IT and HR to ski instructors, lift operators, ski patrol, mechanics and electricians - just to name a few.

Ski areas have workforce challenges just like every other sector. In addition to the demographics issues facing our state, the rural locations of many ski areas can also make it more difficult for them to recruit. However, our members report that staffing has been getting better over the past two seasons and that staffing levels were good heading into this winter.

Ski areas have raised wages over the past several years and most are paying well above minimum wage for entry level positions, with some paying a starting wage of \$20/hour.

Here are a few ways our industry has been supporting workforce development:

Supporting Students in Pursuit of Higher Education & Resort Management Path

We want to help students understand the opportunities – particularly the year-round career opportunities the ski industry offers -- and support them as they pursue their studies of ski area and resort management, hospitality, environmental studies and technical skills. Our organization awards three \$2,000 scholarships each year to graduating Vermont high school seniors. Many of our member ski areas offer scholarships to their local graduating students as well.

Support for Certificate and Higher Education Programs

Vermont's recreation and resort management higher education programs are a very important talent pipeline for our industry, and many graduates are working at ski areas and resorts in and outside of Vermont. Vermont State University has two industry management focused programs, and UVM has a Parks, Recreation and Tourism program. It is important for these place-based learning programs to be successful, and our members support them by periodically

reviewing curricula, by placing interns and hosting other learning opportunities. In turn, we get qualified candidates with on-the-job experience at Vermont ski areas and resorts which can help to retain them to live and work here.

Additionally, UVM has just stood up a hospitality certificate program and are enrolling their first cohort now. They are also in the process of creating a ski industry certificate program as well, which is great news for broadening the pipeline into our industry. We have also supported the Vermont Outdoor Business Alliance's (VOBA) work to create bike, ski and snowboard technician training programs which received grant funding from the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC).

Support for Apprentices Programs and Internships:

Our organization supports the Tramway Maintenance Technician Apprentices Program, also known as the lift mechanic apprentices program, which is registered with the Vermont Department of Labor. Designed to attract new employees and upskill and retain existing employees, this is a 6,000-hour (approximately 3-year) apprenticeship program which includes on-the-job training under trade-qualified staff and a minimum of 75 class learning hours per level, or year. Ski Vermont administers the classes for this program each year.

We support H. 34.

Coordination of efforts across many agencies and organizations can allow our collective resources to go further, creating a better trained workforce for businesses, like our ski areas, and more opportunity and prosperity for job seekers. It will also help identify workforce and training gaps so they can be addressed to ensure that a well-rounded workforce is available for businesses.

There are many workforce development programs, but it can be challenging for businesses and job seekers to find information and determine which might be the best fit for their needs. Packaging of programs and resources, perhaps by sector, could lead to better utilization rates when job seekers can more easily find a path forward into fulfilling jobs and careers that fit their interests.

And finally, better communication between the business community, state government and training providers should lead to better overall collaboration, better outcomes and opportunities for Vermonters, businesses, communities and the state's economy.

Thank you.