

STATEMENT
Dr. William J. Brennan, President
Maine Maritime Academy

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Senator Hamper, Senator Langley, Representative Rotunda, Representative Kornfield and members of the Joint Standing Committees for Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon.

My name is Bill Brennan, President of Maine Maritime Academy, and it is my pleasure to be here today to speak in support of the recommended level of General Fund support to Maine Maritime Academy for the 2016-2017 biennium.

Maine Maritime Academy is a small coeducational college located in Downeast Maine, established by act of the Maine Legislature in the 1930s and is today a unique part of the State's higher education partnership. The Academy specializes in marine-oriented education at the undergraduate and graduate levels, although our mission has evolved and is far broader today with a curriculum emphasizing engineering, management, science and transportation. Students in many of our programs also receive specialized training which prepares them for careers in the U.S. Merchant Marine or the uniformed services of the United States. We are one of six such colleges in the Country, established pursuant to Federal Law in the 1940s. Today we offer degree programs in marine engineering operations, marine engineering technology, marine systems engineering, power engineering technology, marine transportation and several other ocean-related areas.

In many respects, Maine Maritime Academy is the state's original STEM institution and again this year, we have been listed by U.S. News and World Report as one of the top small undergraduate engineering schools in the country. Impressively, we have also been recognized by Money Magazine as the top public college in America and the fourth best college in the country for returning value on a higher education investment. I know that these are achievements that you take great pride in too and I appreciate the opportunity to share with you some of our challenges.

If you were to visit our campus today you would see our bridge simulator, which functions in much the same way as a flight simulator, and is dependent upon highly sophisticated computer and optical software, to provide students a very realistic training platform. This simulator is located in what once was a cafeteria. Our tanker simulator, a lab which trains our students in how to safely discharge cargoes like petroleum products, was built in the cellar of the historic Eastern States Normal School classroom building.

Our form of education requires ever-increasing technological advances to keep current with international training standards mandated by the U.S. Coast Guard, as well as with standards of our academic accreditation agencies, including the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) and the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET).

At one time, most of our buildings were constructed and maintained by the State, however, those days are long gone. Nevertheless, I am pleased to report that we continue to overcome difficult challenges and just last week, we opened the first classroom building built on our campus in over 30 years. Three-quarters of the cost of that building was raised from private sources, primarily from graduates of the Academy and from companies that employ our graduates. The People of Maine, who contributed the balance through Bond support, now have a new state-of-the-art engineering, science and research center on their campus.

Our accomplishments have come at some sacrifice due to the financial challenges facing all public educational institutions in the State during the past few years. While the Academy's General Fund Appropriations have remained relatively unchanged for the past several funding cycles, our costs have continued to increase and we have approached the point of diminishing returns in adapting our antiquated buildings to contemporary purposes. Today, our general fund appropriation represents less than 25 percent of our operating costs and yet the other state maritime academies that we compete with receive upwards of 48 percent of their operating revenue through state appropriations.

Nevertheless, we are appreciative that there are legislative efforts underway to help us address some of the obstacles we confront and I also appreciate that this budget proposal does reflect an increase of funds. While a modest change, this adjustment will make a critical difference in several deferred maintenance projects as well as in mitigating some the impact of cost escalation and ultimately enable Maine students to enjoy both the intellectual and economic benefits of a Maine Maritime education.

Our enrollment is at record levels and we are slightly beyond our maximum capacity. Although a challenge for us to administer, we are particularly mindful that this means more and more young Maine women and men are able to benefit from our unique, hands-on, educational philosophy and our reputation as one of the top undergraduate colleges of engineering in the country.

Professional placement rates for our students remain very strong, with most choosing from multiple employment opportunities in their chosen fields prior to graduation. Of particular note, our job placement is very high – of those students who graduated last May, in excess of 90 percent had jobs in their chosen fields within 90 days of graduation – some of those jobs paying salaries in the six figures.

Maine Maritime Academy is a career-oriented institution – that is our mission and I believe that we serve the People of the State of Maine very well. We are a very small college with a very focused program of study and we operate in a very conservative fiscal fashion in an effort to attempt to keep our cost down such that any qualified Maine student who wants a Maine Maritime education can afford to attend.

Thank you for your time and consideration regarding the recommended biennial funding for the Academy. I would be happy to attempt to answer any questions you may have at this time – or, later during Committee work sessions if that is your preference.