

Denise Scammon
Franco Center
LD 912

Chair Rotundo, Chair Sachs, and honorable members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of LD 912 and LD 1163.

My name is Denise Scammon and I am the marketing and development director at the Franco Center, a Maine 501(c)3 nonprofit in Lewiston, Maine. Our nonprofit's mission is "to honor and preserve our Franco-American heritage, and welcome our neighbors from diverse cultures through live performances, celebrations, and education."

I support LD 912. Our nonprofit's venue is the former St. Mary's Church which was built in 1907 to serve the French Canadian immigrants who came to Lewiston to work in its mills and factories. The former church is historically significant for many reasons and yet funding from grants for its repairs is becoming more difficult to acquire as the competition for this type of funding is being sought by more and more equally qualified entities each year.

Our Lewiston location is in one of Maine's most low-income neighborhoods. Our mission work is important to this neighborhood and the local creative economy. People attending events at our venue bring activity and commerce to this neighborhood. By hosting subsidized cultural events at our venue, we can reach more of the community. We recently hosted 260 school children at a magic show with subsidized tickets. We feel a responsibility to cultivate an appreciation for live performances in children and so the grant we got to subsidize those tickets was a success!

We have been visited by tourists from out of the country, most recently Quebec, but also from France. Also, TF1, a news station in France, sent reporters from their Washington D.C. office to interview our board members and others who speak French. The focus of that interview was why the French language is important in Maine. Three other media outlets followed suit.

Acting as stewards of this aging Gothic-style former church is a very important task for our board members and staff. More funds are needed to invest in our historically significant building to keep it standing for another 100 years.