

Greetings, Chair Rotundo, Chair Sachs, and honorable members of the committee.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of LD 912: An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Restore Historic Community Buildings.

My name is Deborah A. Smith and I am a registered, active voter in Belfast, Maine. In 2010, I earned a doctorate in Public Policy from the Muskie School of Public Service at the University of Southern Maine. My dissertation research explored the rationales that encourage grant makers to support arts and culture in Maine, sometimes referred to as the creative economy.

I strongly support LD 912. Maine's inventory of historic community buildings is exceptional; each one is an opportunity to support Maine's local businesses, bolster tourism, increase access to civic engagement, and celebrate Maine's unique character.

In my work as a consultant for several nonprofits in Maine that are based in historic buildings, I have seen first-hand how these organizations function as beloved community anchors in Eastport, Machias, Monhegan, and Winter Harbor. Here is how one of the Friends of Liberty Hall in Machiasport describes that majestic edifice, but the sentiments could speak for hundreds of other elegant buildings across the state:

*“Until its closure in 2000, the building stood at the center of civic life in Machiasport and beyond. It served as an important focus for community gatherings, public meetings and social and artistic events. In a region where access to public facilities is severely limited, where young people struggle to envisage a long-term future and communities are challenged by public health and significant wealth inequality, a restored Liberty Hall would offer an important focus for the rebuilding of community life. The completion of the full interior renovation would enable old and young, long-time residents and summer visitors to come together to find common purpose. In a place of long winters, Liberty Hall would help alleviate social isolation, enabling people and community groups to organize informal learning activities and cultural events that can bring people together and foster a sense of local pride.”* [Quoted with permission of the Friends]

Thank you for considering this important bill. You will not regret the investment it represents for Maine's economic future.

Deborah A. Smith, Ph.D.