

Mark Bessire
Portland Museum of Art
LD 1163

LD 1163 – An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue for Capital Improvements for Arts and Cultural Facilities

Thank you for your consideration of LD 1163

The State of Maine has a vitally important and impactful group of cultural organizations that serve our citizens on a daily basis and provide economic strength through employment and support the Hospitality and Tourism sector. We are thankful that during the pandemic we were included in the allocation of funds to help us continue to serve our communities in difficult times. It was an important acknowledgement about who we are as a people, and what makes our region so unique. During this period, we brought people together and helped them overcome the isolation and anxiety that Covid brought to us all. It is time to invest in the sectors future before deferred maintenance goes beyond repair.

Despite the Portland Museum of Art's contribution to the economy and employment, including \$29.8 million in total output, \$8.7 million in direct labor income which supported an additional \$4.2 million in indirect and induced impacts, and \$12 million in direct tourism-related expenditures, art and cultural institutions like ours are still an afterthought in terms of state funding. Everybody loves the work we provide to serve our communities, but takes our impact for granted when we are not included in meaningful state-wide discussions for state funding, the way other industries are. This is a mistake, as the cultural, social, and economic impacts of the arts define our tourism-based economy and regional identity.

As our public sector services shrink, many non-profits are feeling the pressures on our communities' expectations and needs, but most of us are still serving our constituents in dated and dilapidated infrastructure. As a sector, we've found ways to do more with less, ensuring people's needs are met—but we can't do it much longer. Our infrastructure is becoming a barrier for accessibility, as well as technology and labor. As we lead in promoting equity and diversity in our society, we struggle to keep pace with our communities needs.

I'd encourage you to take the time to travel around our state and experience the deferred maintenance throughout the sector. Due to our missions and non-profit status, each dollar we raise—in a climate that is more competitive than ever—is going to serve the people of Maine through programs and engagement. Infrastructure needs will never rise to the top when organizations are doing their best just to stay afloat. Funders for the arts are focused on programs and people—what we need is state support for our facilities that transform communities, economies, and lives.

Please support this bill to enable our sector to receive fair and appropriate consideration. If we do not act soon the deferred maintenance may go beyond repair.

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Portland Museum of Art