

“Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Ann Cleveland. I am here on my own time to speak in support of LD 2092, An Act to Equalize Funding for the Maine Maritime Academy. I am a Professor of Marine Biology in the Corning School of Ocean Studies at Maine Maritime Academy, and I am the President of the Faculty Senate. I have been teaching at MMA for 22 years. This position has brought meaning and purpose to my life, and I feel humbled, grateful, and a little bit nervous to be speaking to you now in support of this legislation. It is so important to the continued mission of teaching excellence at MMA, and I want to make sure I can convey that today.

The proposed LD 2092 would increase state funding to bring MMA on parity with the other state colleges and universities in Maine. Some of this additional funding would go to increase salary for faculty and staff, but I want to emphasize that this is not about greed, it is not about putting more money in our pockets as an extravagance. I served eleven years as department chair of the Ocean Studies department, and one thing that kept me up at night was worrying about how to recruit and retain excellent teaching faculty. Any time we had a faculty member leave, or retire, I had real fear and panic about finding a replacement who would value teaching and service as much as my colleagues and I. We could not offer the financial compensation of competing institutions when looking for new hires. Twice in the last five years, we have hired Ocean Studies faculty who have left within a year because they could find higher paid positions elsewhere. Right now, we are a department of nine faculty and a stellar laboratory manager, and we are supported by many staff who understand and support our mission to provide an outstanding experiential education to our students. Our enrollment in Ocean Studies has markedly increased in the last several years as students, parents, and teachers learn about what we do, and recognize the commitment our faculty make to our students. We are – above all else – a teaching institution and we place students at the center of everything we do. That sort of commitment to students and teaching needs to be appreciated, and nurtured, and supported. It is not by accident that we have assembled the faculty we have – we are a family. I fear losing members of this teaching family to other institutions who can offer financial rewards greater than what we are paying currently. The funding from LD 2092 would go a long way to enhance recruitment and retention of MMA faculty and staff, which would insure we continue to provide the stellar educational opportunities we have always been known for. I respectfully ask for your support of this legislation.