

Jane McCamant

Regarding LD 2092 An Act to Equalize Funding for the Maine Maritime Academy

31 January 2024

I would like to testify in support of LD 2092. I live in Bucksport and work as the Research and Instruction Librarian at Maine Maritime Academy.

I only began working at MMA at the end of the 2022-23 academic year, and I am still getting a sense of the place, but already I am impressed by the unique potential of this institution. It is a remarkable and rare thing to have a STEM-focused curriculum at an institution with the faculty-to-student ratio of a liberal arts college. But despite this nurturing environment, many students still struggle to make the adjustment to college-level academics, and many of them seek support in our little corner of campus. Academic Support and Library Services is one combined department at MMA, and we have only four full-time staff across both areas.

Academic Support Services includes testing facilities for students with disability accommodations, tutoring, writing help, and other services that are on the front lines in the battle for student retention. For most of the fall semester this year, academic support services was so desperately understaffed that we regularly shared staff from the library. This allowed them to function on their busiest days but meant that we in the library had to shift our activities to cover as best we could. The recent hire of an additional part-time staff member has made this situation less desperate, but this important area of campus life deserves the stability that only increased full-time staffing can bring.

The library itself is another lynchpin of student academic success on campus—whether it is in simply providing a quiet space in which to practice for a Coast Guard exam, or in the provision of scholarly resources to support original scientific research. Inadequate staffing in the library not only makes it difficult for us to expand our services and reach out to the campus community, but it makes it impossible for us to take full advantage of resources the library already possesses. For example, the library holds the archives of the Academy itself, a collection of papers, photographs, and artifacts that document not just this institution but an important slice of the maritime history of Maine. This fall we received multiple requests for materials from these collections, but our skeleton crew is so occupied with the basic day-to-day functioning of the library that these kinds of special requests are impossible to fulfill. No one has time to even chip away at the organization of these materials, much less give them the attention they would need to make them accessible to the wider Academy community. This is a small example, but it is indicative of the cumulative burden of staff vacancies.

It seems natural to me that all the public universities and colleges in Maine would receive the same proportionate funding; fairness alone justifies support of this bill. But it needn't stand alone, for there is ample evidence that additional funding, especially in support of staff and faculty salaries, would be put to immediate and effective use. I urge you to support this legislation.