

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Nathaniel Zmek, and I wanted to thank you all for taking the time to hear from everyone on this important bill. I am here on my own time to speak in support of LD 2092, An Act to Equalize Funding for the Maine Maritime Academy.

Maine Maritime Academy has been a large part of my life. While I am “from away”, I arrived at the institution as a freshman in 2011, graduated in 2015, and now I have the distinct pleasure of helping students achieve academic success as a staff member.

I remember traveling to Castine for academic orientation and feeling completely overwhelmed by the sights, sounds, and excitement for a future in the maritime industry. The first day of college is stressful for anyone, but something about traveling states away, being dropped off in a town I knew very little about, and jumping feet first into an institution with decades of tradition felt particularly intimidating.

But it wasn't long before those worries melted away. Guided by the wonderful staff and faculty who work tirelessly to integrate everyone into the institution, I quickly felt like I was a part of something much bigger than myself. And while I knew that I would be learning the ropes, so to speak, I learned much more than just the inner workings of international maritime trade. I learned how to work with others of wildly different backgrounds and beliefs, the importance of service to others, and how to row in the same direction towards a common goal (both figuratively and literally).

As a staff member, I've had the wonderful opportunity to help new members of the MMA community find that same place of belonging. And while MMA graduates are known for their resourcefulness and their sense of duty, and I hope MMA is able to provide the same opportunities I received in the future. And by supporting LD2092, I believe we'll be able to do just that.

Thank you.