

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Sam Sotirelis and I am writing in support of LD 2092, An Act to Equalize Funding for the Maine Maritime Academy.

I have worked at the Maine Maritime Academy as a custodian for a little over a year now. I will say that I do enjoy working there; the custodial staff works well together and the overall working environment is congenial. The one area that has been problematic for me is the pay inequity. **We work for \$16.28 an hour. I do want to stress that amount of \$16.28 an hour.** This, I believe, is insulting to each and every one of us. We – the Custodians - are called **Essential Workers**, which apparently means that we are required to show up for work in all kinds of weather. If the Academy is closed, we are still expected to travel those treacherous roads to get to work. In spite of this extreme responsibility – which we all take seriously – we are paid the least of any worker at MMA. Also, it is expected that we have reliable transportation, and since we all live a distance away, this can be a challenge.

My take home pay amounts to approximately: \$1,800.00 a month and the cost of a rental for a month in Hancock County – if it can be found – starts at approximately \$1,600 a month – plus utilities. Add that to the cost of reliable transportation and negative numbers start to appear. These are only two of the numerous expenses that a person must meet on a regular basis. My wage of **\$16.28 an hour** is well below what is called a **livable wage** – which is all that we are asking for.

We are presently negotiating a contract and have been offered the insulting amount of a 2% raise. For me, this amounts to approximately 33 cents more an hour. This does nothing to raise the standard of life for me or my coworkers. We need what I would call a **real raise**. Yes, percentagewise – 25% for two years does seem extreme, but in reality it is just making it possible for MMA to help retain the small custodial staff that it has at the present time. The work we do is often very unpleasant and must be done over and over again on a daily basis. This is not a profession that many people aspire to work in; therefore, it is very hard to recruit new workers. Add that **extremely low wage** to unpleasant work, and the outcome is exactly what has happened at MMA. Fewer and fewer people apply so more and more work is expected from the remaining staff.

I feel that there has to be a much higher value placed on the work that is done by the custodial staff. To show how much it is valued - it is only appropriate to offer a livable wage that would actually be commensurate with being an Essential Worker. We are there every day doing the work that makes everyone proud to work **and for the students to live** in such a **clean and, therefore, healthy environment**.

One more item - I think that it is necessary that a clause be added stipulating that it is mandatory that MMA uses some of this additional funding to increase the pay of their lowest paid workers – their dedicated custodial staff.

Thank you for listening.

Sam Sotirelis