

Blossom M. Thao
Castine, ME

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs committee. My name is Blossom Thao from Castine, Maine. I am here on my own time to ask these committees to increase funding for Maine Maritime Academy in Maine's supplemental budget.

In my role as Director of Residential Life & Student Activities, I have the privilege of being able to build relationships across departments with various staff, faculty, and supervisors to support our students. I have never worked anywhere that feels more like home. It's an exceptional feeling when you wake up excited to go to work and to spend time with people that bring you joy. The x-factor at MMA is its exceptional people.

From Coaches to Custodial Staff, Faculty, to Ship's Crew, Academic Support Services, to Campus Safety, our staff always think of students first. Supporting and funding pay parity for MMA would directly impact MMA employees who give this place a heartbeat. MMA employees are deserving of a salary that not only allows them to keep up with the cost of living but also allows the Academy to show employees that their deep care for the students goes noticed and appreciated.

It is not an understatement that employees at MMA are underpaid. Our wages are significantly behind the cost of living, and the pay that a person does take home does nothing to show that they have worked tirelessly and passionately towards supporting students. MMA is also in an isolated area, where housing prices are hyper-inflated and owning a home near work is unattainable. It's not a surprise to me that MMA has high employee turnover and challenges hiring new employees.

Personally, I love working at MMA. I have never felt so close to co-workers, been so amazed by such an intelligent student body, or identified so strongly with a school's mission. I can see myself working here until I retire as I don't think there is anywhere that is a better fit for me. However, logically staying at MMA would be my glass ceiling. There is no room for advancement for me at MMA. If I stay here, I will have to work for another 35 years before hitting the top of my pay grade. The salaries for current vacant positions are also far from being worth it to move different departments. From my conversations with other employees, I know they are also motivated by strong ties to the MMA community and deep care for the students, but also experience intrusive thoughts about making more money elsewhere while not carrying the extra burden of many vacant positions at the school.

I hope that I have clearly relayed my support of this funding for MMA and the immediate need to dedicate funds to employee salaries. MMA is an exceptional place and is deserving of more funds to truly help the Academy's employees and to help meet its goal of providing the best marine and related education of any small college. We cannot do this without your help.

Sincerely,

Blossom M. Thao
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