

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 David Sorich. I am here on my own time to ask these committees to increase funding for Maine Maritime Academy in Maine's supplemental budget.

A few weeks ago, I was conversing with a colleague who is an MMA alum. One of their classmates commented on how hiring an MMA candidate used to be a slam dunk, now they will barely even consider an MMA graduate for open positions. This conversation is not an anomaly, this is a conversation that appears to be gaining traction as I have heard this same thing from others. The product of MMA, similar to other higher education institutions, hinges primarily on the quality and competence of its institutional faculty and instructional staff. Currently, MMA is having difficulty attracting qualified and competent candidates for open teaching and instructor positions. For the Engineering and Marine Transportation Departments it has become common to only receive one applicant for vacant positions.

I recently chaired the committee to hire a candidate for an open position in the International Business and Logistics department. It took over a year to fill the position. During that time, our top candidate laughed at us and withdrew their name when compensation was discussed. The next candidate took only 30 minutes to refuse our compensation offer. We followed up with him and he was flat out insulted at our offer and was in disbelief that our pay structure was so low. We were finally able to hire someone great, by chance, as they live on the Blue Hill Peninsula. The quality of instruction cannot run on luck in infinitum. The enrollment office was looking to hire a new VP, two top candidates withdrew/or refused offers based on compensation, one was even an MMA alum. Every indicator is repeating the same song; that we do not have a competitive pay structure and because of that, the overall quality is starting to decline and will continue to do so with each and every retirement or resignation where we are unable to hire an equally qualified and competent replacement.

Creating a more competitive salary structure through an increase in the funding from the State of Maine benefits everyone involved: Faculty, Staff, Students, and the State of Maine. An increase in funding allows for the hiring of quality and competent teaching and instructional staff to improve and maintain the overall quality of the MMA product. In the past the cost of living in Maine was favorable compared to other New England locations and that provided incentive for draw in faculty and staff. The cost-of-living advantage no longer exists. Macroeconomic conditions of the last five years have erased this advantage to the detriment of MMA and other Maine institutions. Improving the quality of the MMA product creates an atmosphere and a place that students of Maine will want to attend. The increased funding would allow for a decrease in tuition rates, which would make MMA more affordable to State of Maine students.

The more State of Maine students who are able to earn their maritime licenses improves the overall society of Maine by having higher wage earners which is beneficial on many levels. We know there are students out there who would attend MMA if the cost/tuition structure were lower. Increased funding from the State of Maine would give them an opportunity to do so. Increased funding is not solely about paying people more, but it is about the achieving the long-term, sustainable success of MMA. The adage, you get what you pay for, reigns as true today as at any other time. If you wish to fund mediocrity, that is fine, but understand, it is a short trip

from mediocrity to extinction. If you believe that MMA is an institution that is beneficial to Maine, then at the very least, our funding should be equal to the other higher education institutions in Maine. At the very least close the gap. The success of MMA, their faculty, staff, and students have a causal relationship with the overall success of the State of Maine.

I believe in MMA and I believe in what MMA could be. I know that the success of MMA has a direct relationship with the success of Maine. If you want Maine to be successful into the future, then you need to believe in MMA and back up your belief with an increase in the overall funding for MMA. I ask for the members of this committee and the Maine Legislature support additional funding for MMA in this budget or at least pass and fully fund LD2092.

David Sorich
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