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LD 2231

I write in support of LD 2231, “to Promote Access to Education and Workforce Development by Transferring Ownership of the Hutchinson Center Property in Belfast to the City of Belfast.” Given that more than 1,000 local residents have also signified their approval via an online petition circulated by Belfast Senior College, I applaud the decision to include this resolution as an emergency measure during the current legislative session.

Without LD 2231, the risk to quality, inclusive, and affordable learning opportunities in midcoast Maine and beyond is real. If the University of Maine System is allowed to circumvent the intent of the original agreement with the City of Belfast by selling the property, the harm inflicted would be serious. Able to accommodate a diverse range of ages and motivations, the Hutchinson Center provides vitally positive benefit to students, our greater community, the economic prospects of the State, and also future generations.

My perspective is informed by personal connection to the University of Maine System, having earned a Ph.D. in Public Policy from the Muskie School at the University of Southern Maine in 2010 at the age of 56—a lifelong student, indeed. Selling this property for its own benefit (to boost its bottom line) would demonstrate one fact only: that UMS has utter disregard for its own mission, “to advance educational excellence and innovation.” Some of the best professors in my academic career were members of my doctoral committee, who reinforced for me that public education is core to the greater good of civil society. By announcing its intention to even consider this betrayal, UMS has already abandoned what it claims to represent, and therein deeply shamed me. Those who have worked, as I have done, at institutions of higher education are typically required as part of the hiring process to provide a statement of their “philosophy of education.” Mine can be summed up in only seven words: Knowledge ever grows and learning never ends. This is precisely what occurs at the Hutchinson Center. Requiring UMS to transfer the property to the City of Belfast would go far to help correct the University’s proposal to commit an undeniable and unconscionable wrong

Thank you for your attention and, I hope, your support.