

Trudy Miller and Robert Fargey
Northport Maine

To Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee.

We are testifying in opposition to LD 2231.

We are residents of Northport but own commercial property in Belfast and like all Belfast taxpayers we pay significant taxes for that privilege. Belfast has many pressing needs toward which its public time and tax money should be appropriately expended. Taking on the responsibility of the management of the Hutchinson Center in an ill-defined venture is not one of them, especially with no clear plan or guarantee that this can be done without incurring a cost to Belfast taxpayers. We have been told that the city would not actually be responsible for the cost of maintaining the facility but whatever plans are being proposed are kept secret. Either the city would retain ownership of the building in which case they would now be expected to create a profitable enterprise where the University of Maine has been unable to do so, or the taxpayers would have to make up the difference. Alternatively the city could sell the property, however we would be responsible for maintaining it until such a sale takes place and it is not clear that the city could actually sell the property within five years given its obligation to insure that the restrictions on its use are met.

Further, as taxpayers in Maine we object to the idea that the University itself which, as is true of all public universities, is seriously short of money for its own operation, should simply give away a valuable property. It is not the case that somehow the residents of Belfast just deserve to be gifted the Hutchinson Center. The original property was a joint public-private development between a corporation and the University of Maine. The subsequent additional space was financed by a capital campaign some contributions which came from local people but contribution to a capital campaign does not mean that one has ownership in the resulting building. The University has paid for all the upkeep and maintenance of the building and the University rightly owns the building and should be compensated adequately for its sale.

We value higher education greatly - we think that with respect to the Hutchinson Center, the clearest and most appropriate way for it to contribute to that goal is for the University to continue its open RFP process and to use the results of that process to further its own offerings.

Thank you for your attention.

Trudy Miller and Robert Fargey