



Senator Eloise Vitelli
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Testimony of Senator Eloise Vitelli supporting
LD 2231, Resolve, to Promote Access to Education and Workforce
Development by Transferring Ownership of the Hutchinson Center Property
in Belfast to the City of Belfast
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
March 6, 2024

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Eloise Vitelli, and I proudly represent Senate District 24, which includes all of Sagadahoc County and Dresden. Today I offer testimony in support of LD 2231, “Resolve, to Promote Access to Education and Workforce Development by Transferring Ownership of the Hutchinson Center Property in Belfast to the City of Belfast.”

Today, I am speaking in support of the Hutchinson Center as a community resource for higher education. As someone who has spent nearly 40 years as a member of what is now known as New Ventures Maine and who was a UMA employee, I know the value of community resources that offer higher education and workforce development to Mainers of all ages and backgrounds.

For those not familiar: NVME helps Mainers achieve economic security through finding careers and jobs, building their skills through access to education and training, starting their own business, and managing their financial resources through savings. Our primary target population was and has been adults, aged from 25 to 60, mostly women.

When I first started, I worked out of the newly established Bath Center of UMA in a single office above Hallett’s drug store. After a number years, I moved on to a statewide position managing our employment, training, and entrepreneurship programs.

NVME expanded over the years through close association with our university partners, co-locating our offices with university centers from Presque Isle, Houlton, Millinocket, Ellsworth, South Paris, Saco, Rockland, Lewiston, and Brunswick – to name a few.

Being located within the University of Maine system made our work of guiding our participants much easier. We could walk them down the hall to introduce them to a professor, a student services staffer, or other students just like them.

When UMA became the leader in distance learning, the combination of soft touch and high tech became part of our motto. We were often the first point of contact for online classes and support. In other words, we learned from UMA and started our own online courses. We were there in communities across the state working in partnership with other non-profits, businesses, and the public sector to create opportunities for our students.

Having a visible, lively place where learning takes place in a community is an important tool for economic development and community building. It can also help raise the aspirations of generations of Maine people. For these reasons, I urge your support for this proposal.

Thank you for your consideration and time. At this time, I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Eloise".

Eloise Vitelli

Senate Majority Leader, Senate District 24
Sagadahoc County and Dresden