

**Testimony of Leigh Peake, Chief Education Officer, Gulf of Maine Research Institute
In Support of LD 361: An Act to Support the Francis Malcolm Science Center**

Education and Cultural Affairs Committee March 27, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Leigh Peake and I am Chief Education Officer at the Gulf of Maine Research Institute based in Portland. GMRI develops and delivers collaborative solutions to ocean challenges around the world. Our interdisciplinary approach combines world-class marine research with robust community and education programming to understand how natural, social, and economic systems interact.

I'm appearing before you today to testify in support of LD 361 "An Act to Support the Francis Malcolm Science Center."

You may be wondering why a marine organization based in Portland is stepping up to testify on behalf of a planetarium science center based in The County. I am confident you will receive testimony from communities, educators, families, and youth about the value of FMSC locally. I'm here to emphasize the value of FMSC for the state of Maine and to encourage you to invest in the future of this gem of an institution.

Francis Malcolm Science Center has been a strategic partner to GMRI as part of a statewide network of teachers, librarians, and out-of-school educators that stretches from Kittery to Presque Isle, from Eastport to Fryeburg. FMSC is emblematic of the central purpose of the network – to break down the barriers between in- and out-of-school learning and to enrich the opportunities youth have to engage in hands-on data-rich science investigations.

For nearly five years, FMSC has been the northernmost anchor point for the network, recruiting and supporting educators, hosting gatherings and professional development, and modeling excellence in informal science education. Elaine Hendrickson from FMSC is one of a select group of Lead Educators in our network, and in that role she contributes to the direction and evolution of the network. At network meetings, FMSC shares their work as inspiration for others, and gathers ideas, resources, and expertise to bring back to other educators in The County. Within the region, FMSC educators are extraordinary collaborators, working with schools, 4-H, land trusts, libraries, and other community-based organizations to enrich youth experiences. When colleagues from NASA and the National Academies of Sciences asked to visit Maine to see our work in rural communities, FMSC stepped up to host. Perhaps most important to us at GMRI, the remarkable group of volunteer educators at FMSC are tireless in insisting that we make our work relevant and compelling to Aroostook youth and then collaborating to make sure we do that well.

I never cease to be astonished by what FMSC gets done in a small building in Easton, Maine with all volunteer educators. The addition of education staff, along with the proposed much-needed capital improvements, that are part of this one-time General Fund allocation of \$200,000, will help to create a sustainable pathway for FMSC to continue to do its important work in The County and across the state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

