

“Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and Esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs.”

My name is Mary Jo Badger, and I am from Presque Isle, Maine. I am here to support LD 361, “An Act to Support the Francis Malcolm Science Center.”

As a volunteer at the Francis Malcolm Science Center for the past three years, I have experienced the joy, amazement, and learning that takes place when students visit the Center. It is wonderful to see the curiosity and excitement of the students when they walk in and know they have learned something when they walk out to go home or back to school.

As the main planetarium projectionist, I get to see the wonder on their faces as the students walk into the planetarium the first time and hear their reaction when the program shows all around them. For some of these students it will be the only time they will get to experience the full dome.

We are the only planetarium north of Orono. We are very proud of being able to provide this experience to the communities in the area, keeping it affordable to those who want to attend. We are struggling to keep the planetarium alive and functioning. To the best of my knowledge the system was put in between 2012 and 2016. In the past three years we have had to replace the projector, twice, with a used one. Projectors and parts for the projector we have are becoming harder to find and on top of that we, myself, and two other volunteers have had to do the physical replacement of the last projector. Each time the projector is replaced it needs to be refocused for the dome, and adjustments need to be made to the mirrors. A teacher asked today what was wrong with the images as they seemed less vibrant than in the past. The mirrors are covered with dust, and we don't have the implements needed to remove it without scratching the mirrors. Even though this replacement projector seems identical to the one we replaced it was not. Adjustments to the support of the projector inside the cabinet had to be made as it didn't fit properly. By trial and error, we were able to get the projector placed and focused to the best of our ability.

The computer that was put in at the time of the planetarium had to be replaced last year as it could no longer be updated to play the programs. During the time the planetarium is down we make do, but that also means the community is losing out on this experience. The students are disappointed because they look forward to being in the planetarium to see a show.

After each visit teachers are given exit tickets to fill out for us. There are two questions “What did you learn” and “What did you like best?” From exit tickets the students fill out after their visit and send back to us, as feedback, we learn what we need to do better and what the groups have gained from their experience. This information is used make changes to the way our programs are presented. We constantly make changes to fit the different abilities and age groups that come to the Center. There have been times we have had homeschool students from age 3 to 17, in one group.

It would be a great loss to the communities if the Center had to close its doors. I am urging you to see the necessity to the communities to keep the Center open. I urge you to vote “Ought to Pass”

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

