

March 23, 2025

Greetings Senator Susan Bernard, Cosponsor Mark Babin, and Esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Vonda Lavway, and I am from the town of Easton, in Maine. I am a second-grade teacher. I am here to support LD 361, "An Act to Support the Francis Malcolm Science Center".

I am moved to testify in support this extremely important act for our science center, because it is such an integral part of my teaching and my yearly curriculum. Not only is FMSC educational, it provides activities that are fun-filled and accessible for our students. Our school, Easton Elementary, is located in the same town as FMSC so I have a very long history of involvement with this center, as a teacher, as well as a volunteer.

One thing that FMSC provides, that no other local organization offers, is flexibility of programs. The schools are provided with a wide range of educational choices for programming, but above and beyond that, we can request lessons to be modified, combined, or we can even request that new lessons be specifically designed to meet the demands of our curriculum. As well, the science center has another asset that is not offered anywhere else locally. They offer wonderful dome shows in their planetarium. There are many educational shows to choose from, and countless ones that can be requested.

Another huge benefit to our school, is that FMSC provides our school with free or extremely minimal programming costs. Our school operates on a tight budget, so fieldtrips that are designed as cost per student, or trips that would require costly fuel or meal allowances, are not a possibility for us. Having FMSC located in our small town has allowed us to visit multiple times per year, with little or no cost to us. The other teachers at our school, teaching at a variety of age levels, have also found FMSC to be a wonderful yearly resource.

Continuing on with the beneficial offerings, FMSC has a wonderful trail system across the road from its facility. The trails are regularly groomed, the volunteers are out on the trails often, doing safety checks, looking for educational nature offerings, and they have even integrated a Story Walk, with book pages on signs, so hikers can do some reading along the way! In recent years, a local business

donated and built a snowshoe hut at the entrance of the trails. This warming hut has allowed our school children, and community, to have a comfortable shelter to put on show shoes, and have seating out of the elements. As well, a parking lot was recently added at the mouth of the trails for easier and safer trail access.

As you can see all the programs are planned carefully and thoroughly. The dedicated volunteers that teach, are mostly veteran teachers. Having highly trained teachers on board has endless benefits, and one of the most valuable of such is having lessons offered that are fun, packed with content, and highly based on our own Maine Learning Results.

Outside the school children's programming, some of the other opportunities that are offered through the science center are community programs such as wreath making, teacher workshops, midnight snowshoe hikes, crafts, and much more. Most recently, FMSC hosted a Totality Extravaganza. The many volunteers started planning for this event more than a year ahead of time, and it was a wonderful offering for the community, which included educational craft stations, souvenirs, eclipse glasses, and informative talks. It was attended and well received by the community as a whole.

As you can see, Francis Malcolm Science Center is an invaluable resource to have, and our school would notice a huge void in our yearly instruction if FMSC were unable to continue with its operations.

Committee, please support Francis Malcolm Science Center with your vote "ought to pass" and please continue to uphold this vote as well as support it to its culmination.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Vonda Lavway