

**Testimony in Support of LD 681**  
**An Act Regarding Public Higher Education Funding in the State**  
David Sorich, Blue Hill

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am David Sorich, and I am testifying in support of LD 681 on my own personal time. I am supporting this legislation because Maine Maritime Academy needs more resources to provide fair support to the Academy's dedicated faculty and staff. Without this support, MMA will continue to struggle with recruitment and retention of exemplary staff.

Currently, 80% of full-time faculty members (58 out of 72) are considering or actively looking to find employment elsewhere or retire. The #1 reason, compensation. Followed closely by workload (#2) and climate (#3). A significant number do not want to leave but cannot afford to stay. On a pain scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, 69% of survey respondents recorded a pain of compensation at a level 7 or above.

Just this week, a very popular professor and colleague resigned for the above-mentioned reasons. He is tired of the extra workload, the climate that is all over the place with a feeling of apathy from the Board of Trustees, and lack of competitive wages.

Losing a faculty member would not be an issue, except there is no line of qualified candidates waiting to be hired. For our Engineering and Marine Transportation Departments, we are lucky to receive 1-2 candidate applications for a position.

The work is not worth the effort. The lack of resources in state appropriations is creating an atmosphere of apathy and silent quitting. Faculty members do not feel valued and anyone who feels such a way will only do what is required. As a small institution, our success is dependent upon people going above and beyond.

Anecdotally, the comments from industry and alumni are growing in number. The comments where once MMA graduates were at the top of the list of maritime graduates, now, they have fallen to the middle of the pack at best.

We once used to have around 1000 students and now we struggle to maintain 850 students. Faculty, Staff, and even Students are hesitant to recommend MMA due to the lack of resources available to all MMA Stakeholders. The climate, a product of the lack of resources, is scaring potential students away, while others are regretting their choice.

If students are the priority, the Faculty and Staff need to be the priority. Providing Faculty and Staff with the resources needed will allow them to make the students a

priority. When this happens, the ship will be 'righted' and the institution can head back in the direction it once was heading.

From Sept. of 2018 to Sept. of 2024, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the U.S. has risen 27.76%. During that time, faculty raises have only amounted to 12.04%, with the last raise received in August of 2022. The faculty contract expired on June 30<sup>th</sup> of 2023. That is two years without a cost-of-living rise.

Meanwhile, from 2019 to 2024, the median price of a home in Maine has gone from \$225K to \$390K, an increase of 73%. The income required to afford a median priced home in Maine in 2023 was \$128K. Not one professor at Maine Maritime Academy makes that amount. We are currently hiring new faculty members for \$65K.

I'm sure the housing numbers and inflation numbers are ones that you are already fully aware. The fact that we have been working without a contract for almost two years, may be new information. All of these numbers are impacting everyone around the state.

In the end, the questions really boil down to this, Is MMA an institution that is important to the citizens of Maine? Does it serve a worthwhile purpose? Does it turn Maine residents into productive members of the Maine society? How much does the Governor and the Legislature of Maine care about MMA as an institution? The funny thing about Federal and State governments is this, their level of care is measured in appropriation spending. Right now, the level of care of the Governor and Legislature is not real high. We receive significantly less than other Maine institutions of higher learning. The next closest in comparison receives \$8M-\$10M more than we do. To put that in perspective, a \$2M increase in appropriations will help catch up faculty salaries with inflation, and help MMA right the ship. Please support the passage and funding of LD 681.