

Wilson Ball
North Yarmouth, Maine

Dear Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development,

My name is Wilson Ball. I am from North Yarmouth, Maine, and I currently reside in Tokyo, Japan. I am submitting this testimony in favor of LD 1336, *An Act to Establish the Maine-Aomori Sister-State Advisory Council*.

My earliest interaction with Aomori was when I was in high school, when my younger brother hosted an exchange student from Aomori through the Maine-Aomori Sister-State Program. Although I was not personally involved with the program itself, I fondly remember the experience of hosting our exchange student, and as I go through my daily life in Japan, I regard it as a very influential factor in starting my interest in Japanese culture. Our exchange student was very kind, and much more considerate than I would expect any middle school-aged child to be. Before making the very long trip to Maine, he carefully read the profile that my brother had provided to the exchange program, and brought gifts for our whole family that he thought we would enjoy. He brought an origami set, small decorative paper lanterns, and daruma otoshi: a traditional Japanese game with stacking blocks. After interacting with him for the week, my curiosity for Japanese traditions and culture only grew. I believe that if not for this exchange program, I would not be where I am today: living abroad in Tokyo, studying Japanese cuisine at the Tokyo College of Sushi and Washoku (traditional Japanese cooking).

A few years ago, I had the fortune to be able to travel almost the entirety of Japan, North to South, and I learned more than I could have ever hoped to about the people, environment, values, and cultures of the country. Each region I visited felt very unique. My opinions have since been reinforced, learning in more detail the differences in the cooking styles of the regions; each distinctly shaped by the history, environment, and pride of the people living there. The prefectures all have their own strong personalities and values that express themselves through the people. I struggle to think of a personality that matches Maine's as much as that of Aomori. Independence that springs from a strong sense of resilience, consideration of others and community, and a ready willingness to help others in need are values that I very definitively feel from both Maine and Aomori.

Although I do currently live in the metropolis of Tokyo, in the event that I decide to continue living in Japan I can hardly imagine a single place in the country that evokes such familiar feelings of home as much as Aomori. I believe the establishment of an advisory council will help other people experience this home they have on the other side of the planet, and foster a community with the potential to span generations.

Thank you for your consideration. I encourage you to support LD 1336.