

Testimony in Support of LD 1643 – An Act to Establish the Maine Life Science Innovation Center

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Chairman Curry, Chairwoman Gear, esteemed members of the Committee—

My name is Fred Bever. I'm the Chief Communications Officer at the MDI Biological Laboratory in Bar Harbor, and I'm here in strong support of LD 1643. Thank you for the opportunity.

For more than 125 years, the non-profit MDI Biological Laboratory has advanced human health through biomedical research and training. Today, our scientists lead efforts to understand aging, regeneration, and how our environment impacts health.

We also lead a statewide partnership of 17 institutions that trains college students, shares advanced technologies, and invests in research by early career faculty. Members include nearly every UMaine campus, Colby, Bates, Bowdoin, UNE, USM, SMCC, and others.

This highly collaborative network has given more than 3,000 undergraduates hands-on bioscience experience—free of charge. **Ninety percent** pursue science or medical careers or advanced degrees; over 20 percent do so in Maine.

We want to grow that number. The Life Science Innovation Center can help through better coordination of workforce development and entrepreneurial training, supporting the development of local bioscience companies, and aligning training with private sector needs.

At MDI Bio Lab, we've experienced the sector growth others have mentioned here. Since 2001, we've grown from a seasonal operation to 10 year-round research groups, 118 staff, and a \$20 million budget.

Our newest initiative, MDI Bioscience is entrepreneurial, working with low-cost, high-impact animal models to develop applied health solutions. One exciting project is a collaboration with the Bigelow Laboratory and the Roux Institute to seek new anti-inflammatory compounds in ocean seaweeds.

These types of very-Maine efforts aim for real-world impact and commercialization: patents, spin off startups, growing entrepreneurial expertise, and high-wage jobs.

But as with other Life Science organizations and companies, we face challenges in bridging the gap between discovery and development: limited lab space, scarce startup support, fragmented policy, and growing uncertainty about federal research funding.

LD 1643 is a strategic response to these issues. It would help us—and others—turn research into results. It would help to unify resources, boost training, attract investment, devise smarter policies, and overcome regulatory hurdles.

It would help homegrown ideas grow into homegrown companies, better organize and amplify existing efforts to develop the workforce and infrastructure that will also bring **new** Life Science employers to our state .

Thank you. I'm glad to try to answer any questions.