

MAINE MARITIME ACADEMY

A College of Engineering, Management, Science, and Transportation

Joint-Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
Testimony in Support of LD 1139, "An Act to Improve Ferry Service Reliability by Providing Scholarships at the Maine Maritime Academy"
Tuesday, April 11, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Joint-Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs, my name is Chace Jackson and I serve as Maine Maritime Academy's Legislative Affairs Coordinator. I am proud to be here today in support of Sen. Chip Curry's proposed bill, LD 1139, "An Act to Improve Ferry Service Reliability by Providing Scholarships at the Maine Maritime Academy".

Established in 1941 and based in Castine, MMA is Maine's special-purpose college and in fact one of only six State Maritime Academies founded to play a vital role in our nation's maritime interests and national security. We bridge this state's proud seafaring tradition with its storied role in American maritime history, training Maine students who become the finest mariners operating vessels all around the globe. In addition, we offer degrees in the fields of engineering, marine transportation, marine biology and oceanography, and international business and logistics. Our graduates are commonly recognized by industry employers as the best among all maritime academies. Many of our students are members of our Regiment of Midshipmen which is a rigorous course of military-style training, discipline and leadership. MMA prides itself as "**Maine's Leadership College**".

As you may know, the Maine State Ferry Service is a vital component of Maine's transportation infrastructure, providing safe and reliable transportation for passengers and goods to Maine's islands and coastal communities. Many of these communities are central to Maine's sense of identity and inform characterizing features of our state. However, in recent years, the Ferry Service has met the same challenges faced by all state agencies and employers currently providing critical pieces of our state's infrastructure, which is that of workforce recruitment.

LD 1139 aims to address this issue and bolster Maine's compliment of ferry operators by creating the Workforce Development Scholarship Program at MMA. This program will make available scholarships to a minimum of 115 applicants who may or may not be MMA students to assist them in earning the initial credits necessary to work at the Maine State Ferry Service. These scholarships will be available to Maine residents who meet the necessary state criteria for the operation of watercraft for commercial purposes.

By providing this financial assistance, the Workforce Development Scholarship Program will help to ensure that the Maine State Ferry Service has a reliable and well-trained workforce. In turn, this will benefit the communities that rely on the Ferry Service for their transportation needs.

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MMA's participation in the proposed training program is one component of our goal to lead in the "marinization" of those industries, trades, and services that will define the "blue economy" of the future. As Maine's burgeoning offshore wind and aquaculture industries develop, they will join traditional industries like lobstering and fishing in requiring a skilled workforce increasingly familiar with complex, digitized vessels and equipment. MMA believes we can play a major role in helping Mainers who envision a career in one of these industries have the modern competencies to move throughout them over the course of their lives.

LD 1139 provides ongoing funds to support the costs of marketing the scholarship program to students across the state of Maine. These marketing efforts will include direct outreach to high school students and media directed to the general public. By increasing awareness of this opportunity, we hope to attract a diverse and talented group of applicants who are passionate about working in the maritime industry.

In conclusion, I urge you to support LD 1139 and the creation of the Workforce Development Scholarship Program at Maine Maritime Academy. This program will help ensure the Maine State Ferry Service has a reliable and well-trained workforce for years to come, while bridging Mainers with the maritime industry and its exciting future. I would be glad to answer any questions from the Committee. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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